ISSUE 427 | SEPTEMBER 2013

DRAGON®

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

DRAGON®

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DRAGON®

427

DRAGON September 2013

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Going Dark

By Chris Perkins

In years past, when we found ourselves at the lonely crossroads between game editions, the magazines simply went from one edition to the next with nary a breath in between. This time is different. As we turn our attention to the next D&D® rules set, we're putting *Dragon*® and *Dungeon*® on hiatus.

The D&D magazines are going dark beginning in January. In other words, the December issues (#221 of *Dungeon* and #430 of *Dragon*) will be the last issues you see for a while. The magazines will continue on their present trajectories for the next few months, during which time we will answer questions such as the following: when will *Dragon* and *Dungeon* return, what form(s) will the magazines take, how much D&D content will the magazines publish, and how does one submit pitches for articles?

As it stands, we have all the 4th Edition content we need to fill the remaining issues between now and the end of the year, and we are not ready to solicit content for D&D Next. Consequently, we are not accepting articles or adventure pitches this fall, and the submission window (which normally opens on October 1st and closes on November 30th) will remain closed. Anyone who sends a pitch to **submissions@wizards.com** will receive an automated "Thanks, but no thanks" response, along with a short explanation of why we're not accepting content at this time.

Every new edition is a chance for the magazines to evolve, and evolve they will. If you are interested in contributing to the D&D tabletop roleplaying game in the future, my best advice (for the time being) is to start up a regular D&D Next game and familiarize yourself with the new rules. Hone your writing skills as best you can. Then wait to see what happens next.

Bestiary: The Lost World

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

Illustration by Christopher Burdett

Dinosaurs have long been staple monsters of the Dungeons & Dragons® game, and most gamers have a passing familiarity with these reptilian behemoths. That said, the *Monster Manual*® tomes present only a sample of the dizzying array of animals that have lived on our planet through the eons, and dinosaurs make up a tiny fraction of the bizarre and deadly creatures that stalked Earth's prehistory. This article brushes away the dust of ages and reveals three groups of primordial beasts that lived either long before the rise of dinosaurs, or long after their extinction.

In true "monstrous" fashion, the following animals represent either the largest or the most unusual examples of their kind. Their D&D® incarnations take a few liberties with size and habitat, but each adds depth to your "lost world" adventures or serve as an intriguing mount for a humanoid—or a character.

Urdrake

Urdrakes are predators that combine features of both mammals and reptiles. Although reptilian in appearance, urdrakes can have fur and move with the

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REAL-WORLD MONSTERS

If you want to learn more about mammal-like reptiles (urdrakes), eurypterids (sea scorpions), or prehistoric mammals (urbeasts), the following table can point you in the right direction.

Bestiary Name	Real Name
Venomous Urdrake	Euchambersia
Sabermaw Urdrake	Inostrancevia
Sea Scorpion	Jaekelopterus
Spiny Sea Scorpion	Mixopterus
Bonecracker Urbeast	Andrewsarchus
Ironclaw Urbeast	Megatherium
Groundshaker Urbeast	Paraceratherium

swiftness of hunting cats. They have traits and habitats similar to those of behemoths and drakes.

Lore

Nature DC 13: Urdrakes are ancient creatures whose lineage predates that of most natural beasts. They are distantly related to drakes and behemoths.

Encounters

Explorers have catalogued two kinds of urdrakes to date—the venomous and sabermaw varieties.

Gnolls, bugbears, and hobgoblins use sabermaw urdrakes as mounts. Goblins see mastery of a sabermaw as proof of the rider's physical prowess.

Kobolds, goblins, and lizardfolk use venomous urdrakes the way humans might use packs of hunting dogs, letting the swift, perceptive predators run down enemies on foot.

Types of Urdrake

The two known kinds of urdrakes are detailed below. Other kinds, as yet undiscovered, may also exist in remote corners of the world.

Venomous Urdrake

Venomous urdrakes are pack hunters that use their numbers and their venom to bring down prey. They jump in and out of battle, seeking to attack an enemy where it is most vulnerable. Their pack mentality makes them easier to train in groups, and they see their masters as pack leaders.

Venomous Urdrake **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP 125

HP 38; **Bloodied** 19 **Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13 **Perception** +7
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The urdrake can shift 1 square before the attack and after the attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and if the target is granting combat advantage to the urdrake, ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Skills Stealth +9

Str 11 (+1)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-3)	**Cha** 7 (-1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Sabermaw Urdrake

The largest of the urdrakes, the sabermaw is a muscular brute about 12 feet long and 3 feet high at the shoulder. A pair of massive fangs, each the length of a dagger, supplements the sharp teeth that line the creature's powerful jaws. The presence of a rider as fearsome as the sabermaw makes this beast all the more dangerous.

Sabermaw Urdrake **Level 7 Brute**
Large natural beast (mount, reptile) XP 300

HP 94; **Bloodied** 47 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 **Perception** +9
Speed 8 Low-light vision

Traits

Hobbled Prey (mount)
Any creature grabbed by the urdrake grants combat advantage to the urdrake and its rider.

Savage Bite
The urdrake has a +5 power bonus to damage rolls against any creature that is immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the urdrake grabs the target (escape DC 16). The urdrake can grab only one creature at a time, and while grabbing a creature, the urdrake can use *savage bite* only on that creature.

Str 19 (+7)	**Dex** 14 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 6 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Sabermaw Urdrakes in Combat

Left to its own devices, a sabermaw urdrake attacks the closest enemy, seizing the unfortunate foe in its mighty jaws. After it has hold of a target, the sabermaw uses its terrible fangs to rip huge gaping wounds in the victim's body. The urdrake then releases the prey to let it bleed out.

When a sabermaw serves as a mount, the rider usually allows it to follow the same attack routine. The rider dictates the urdrake's targets, and the rider (along with any allies) finishes off victims left mauled and bleeding from the sabermaw's attacks.

Sea Scorpions

Giant scorpions often pose a threat to those venturing into deep caverns and forgotten ruins in search of fame and treasure, and tales of the colossal vermin are common enough among adventurers. Those rare heroes who brave the watery depths of oceans, lakes, and subterranean seas have encountered giant scorpionlike monstrosities every bit as fearsome as their land-bound cousins.

Lore

Nature DC 12: The sea scorpion is an ancient variety of monstrous arthropod adapted for life in primordial seas. This chitinous terror hunts the silent depths of the ocean or preys upon creatures in remote freshwater rivers and lakes. It glides effortlessly through the water, propelled by paddlelike appendages and flicks of its powerful tail.

Sea scorpions come in various shapes and sizes, from swift-swimming hunters a few feet in length to ogre-sized specimens as dangerous as sharks.

Despite the name, sea scorpions are only distantly related to true scorpions, and they lack the latter's infamous poisonous sting. The sea scorpion's powerful pincers can quickly reduce armor and the flesh beneath it to bite-sized chunks.

Encounters

Two versions of this creature exist: the sea scorpion and its smaller cousin, the spiny sea scorpion.

Groups of spiny sea scorpions lurk in the same waters as sharks and crocodiles, scavenging the kills of the larger predators or finishing off wounded prey.

Sahuagin occasionally capture and confine the larger varieties of sea scorpions, then unleash them upon intruders in advance of a sea devil assault. Some groups of sahuagin have trained sea scorpions to accompany their masters into battle or guard lairs.

Types of Sea Scorpion

The two known kinds of sea scorpion are differentiated by their size and their mode of defense.

Spiny Sea Scorpion

Spiny sea scorpions are named for the sharp, chitinous barbs covering their exoskeletons. Although they lack the cooperative ability of true pack hunters, spiny sea scorpions often attack large prey *en masse*, cutting it to pieces with dozens of lacerating pincers.

Spiny Sea Scorpion **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural beast (aquatic) XP 100

HP 28; **Bloodied** 14 **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +6
Speed 2, swim 8 Darkvision, tremorsense 5

Traits

Aquatic
The scorpion can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Standard Actions

Spiny Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 4 damage.

Spiny Surge ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: The scorpion shifts up to half its speed and uses *spiny claw*. If the attack hits, the target also takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Skills Stealth +8
Str 13 (+1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+1)
Con 12 (+1) **Int** 2 (-4) **Cha** 6 (-2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Spiny Sea Scorpions in Combat

A spiny sea scorpion surges toward its prey and slams into its target with pincers extended, letting the barbed appendages tear into its victim's flesh. After its initial charge, the spiny sea scorpion lingers nearby, picking away at the prey until it succumbs to shock and blood loss.

Sea Scorpion

The largest of their kind, sea scorpions live along the bottom of oceans, lakes, and rivers.

Sea Scorpion **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Large natural beast (aquatic) XP 250

HP 72; **Bloodied** 36 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16 **Perception** +9
Speed 2, swim 8 Darkvision, tremorsense 5

Traits

Aquatic
The scorpion can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Standard Actions

Pincer ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, plus 1d6 damage if the scorpion has combat advantage against the target.

Rending Pincers ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: The scorpion uses *pincer* twice.

Move Actions

Pelagic Camouflage ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Requirement: The scorpion must be in the water and have cover or concealment.
Effect: The scorpion makes a Stealth check to become hidden.

Minor Actions

Silt Cloud ✦ Recharge when first bloodied
Requirement: The scorpion must be in the water and within 1 square of ground made of fine particles or debris.
Effect: Close burst 2. The burst creates an area of fine silt that is lightly obscured until the start of the scorpion's next turn.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 15 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 5 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Sea Scorpions in Combat

Preferring to attack with the advantage of surprise, a sea scorpion hides on the bottom of a waterway, waiting for prey to approach. When a suitable victim swims within range, the sea scorpion bursts from hiding and attacks with its pincers. If this initial rush is insufficient to slay the target, the sea scorpion uses its swimming paddles to stir up a cloud of blinding silt, allowing it to hide again and prepare for another attack. A sea scorpion stirs the silt a second time only to cover its escape.

Urbeast

The ancient creatures known as urbeasts walked the land long before most other beasts appeared. Urbeasts dwell far from civilized lands—in dark, ancient forests, remote jungles, and other isolated regions.

These creatures can be trained to serve their masters as beasts of burden, mounts, or even walking siege engines.

Lore

Nature DC 17: Like their mammalian counterparts the behemoths, urbeasts have existed since the dawn of time. Many sages believe urbeasts belong to an ancient order of beasts that are nearly extinct, existing only in small, isolated groups in the wild, untamed regions of the world. Additionally, sages speculate that some types of urbeast are ancestors to more common creatures, such as wolves, hyenas, and rhinoceroses.

Encounters

Adventurers may encounter urbeasts in the wild, or in the company of gnolls, orcs, hobgoblins, and other savage humanoids. Three types are known.

Gnoll tribes favor bonecracker urbeasts for their hyena-like appearance, and powerful gnoll chieftains sometimes ride these ferocious beasts into battle.

Savage humanoids, primarily orcs and hobgoblins, sometimes train groundshaker urbeasts as guardians or fit them with howdahs that can accommodate multiple passengers armed with bows and spears.

Ironclaw urbeasts are difficult to train and normally are found in the wild.

Types of Urbeast

The three varieties of urbeast are differentiated by their size and modes of attack.

Bonecracker Urbeast

The strength of a bonecracker's jaws is legendary, and legends say that the beast can shatter wood, steel, and the bones of its prey with appalling ease. Although bonecrackers may hunt in groups, they attack as individuals and prefer to separate a single target from its allies before closing in for the kill.

Bonecracker Urbeast	**Level 9 Brute**
Large natural beast	XP 400
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58	**Initiative** +7
AC 21, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +11
Speed 8	Low-light vision
Traits	
Paired Hunters (mount)	
The urbeast's rider has combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to none of the rider's allies other than the urbeast.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 17).	
⸸ **Bonecracker Bite ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the urbeast); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d10 + 15 damage, and if the target is bloodied before or after this attack, the target also is slowed and weakened (save ends both).	
Str 21 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+6)	
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 7 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Bonecracker Urbeasts in Combat

A bonecracker seizes an enemy with its bite and then clamps down with its powerful jaws, reducing flesh to pulp and bone to splinters. Such an attack, if it does not slay the target outright, leaves it severely debilitated, allowing the bonecracker (or its allies) to finish off the weakened prey.

Ironclaw Urbeast

A multi-ton behemoth of fur, muscle, and armor-shearing claws, the ironclaw urbeast combines deadly physical attributes with extreme belligerence. It is

Ironclaw Urbeast	**Level 11 Elite Brute**
Huge natural beast	XP 1,200
HP 280; **Bloodied** 140	**Initiative** +6
AC 23, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23	**Perception** +8
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Threatening Reach	
The urbeast can make opportunity attacks against creatures within 2 squares of it.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 12 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⸸ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**	
Effect: The urbeast uses *claw* twice.	
Move Actions	
Towering Posture ✦ At-Will	
Effect: The urbeast rears up on its hind legs until the start of its next turn or until it moves, increasing the range of its *claw* attacks and *threatening reach* by 1 square.	
Str 24 (+12) **Dex** 13 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+8)	
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 2 (+1) **Cha** 4 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

almost fearless, and the small, bony nodules beneath its skin can repel the claws and fangs of predators, as well as the blades and arrows of adventurers.

Although the ironclaw is trainable to a point, it becomes nearly impossible to control upon entering combat, and it generally does not heed its master's commands when enraged.

Ironclaw Urbeasts in Combat

When combat begins, the ironclaw urbeast stands up on its back legs and slashes with its mighty claws. It tends to focus on a single target—preferably the last creature to strike it in melee. So great is the ironclaw's belligerence that it tries to prevent its chosen target from escaping, smashing it to the ground and dragging it back within range for additional attacks.

Groundshaker Urbeast

Rivaling dragons in size, the groundshaker urbeast is aptly named, for the very earth quakes beneath its mighty tread. Although the groundshaker is a peaceful herbivore, its size and strength make it a formidable beast of war, and few creatures can withstand a trampling charge from the massive beast.

The groundshaker urbeast can carry more than one passenger of Medium or smaller size, but only one creature among the passengers can control the beast as its rider.

Groundshaker Urbeasts in Combat

The groundshaker's sheer size and weight are weapons that the creature uses to great effect. Rearing up on its back legs, the groundshaker can bring its forefeet down upon an enemy with bone-shattering power, pinning the unfortunate foe to the ground.

Groundshaker Urbeast	**Level 13 Elite Brute**
Gargantuan natural beast (mount)	XP 1,600
HP 324; **Bloodied** 162	**Initiative** +7
AC 25, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 25	**Perception** +9
Speed 8	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Joint Assault (mount)	
The urbeast's rider can make a basic attack during the same turn that the urbeast uses *stomp* or *trample*.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Stomp ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 13 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⸸ **Pinning Stomp ✦ At-Will**	
Effect: The urbeast uses *stomp* twice. If both attacks hit the same target, the urbeast can grab the target (escape DC 20). Until the grab ends, the target cannot stand up and takes ongoing 25 damage. In addition, the urbeast cannot move or use *trample* while grabbing a creature in this way.	
⸸ **Trample ✦ Encounter**	
Requirement: The urbeast must not have taken a move action on the same turn that it uses this power.	
Effect: The urbeast moves up to twice its speed and can enter enemies' spaces during the move. Each time the urbeast enters an enemy's space for the first time during the move, it can use *stomp* against the enemy, and any enemy that attacked the urbeast during the move grants the urbeast combat advantage for the attack. When the move ends, the urbeast's turn ends.	
Str 25 (+13) **Dex** 13 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+9)	
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 6 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a writer, editor, and game designer who has worked in the gaming industry since 2005. His recent RPG credits include the *Dungeon* magazine adventures "The Vault of Darom Madar" and "Heart of the Scar" from Wizards of the Coast, Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens, and the Critter Cache series from Goodman Games. Aeryn lives in Seattle, Washington, with his wife, Melissa.

Channel Divinity: Nerull

By Jon Green

Illustrations by Matt Cavotta and Nicole Cardiff

Grandmaster Roslow,

Nerull's priest has died. The causes appear to be natural, but given the timing and the person, I cannot rule out foul play.

Before he passed, he gave a brief account of what he knew about the rise and fall of the god of death. I have transcribed his remarks and included them with this letter. Given its source, this information should be taken with a grain of salt, but it is intriguing nonetheless. I've taken the liberty of removing the extraneous homilies and adulations in the transcription. (If I ever hear the phrase, "Praise be to his unholy name and the encroaching darkness" again, it will be far too soon.) In addition, I have edited the profane names used in reference to the Raven Queen, since they are not fit for printing.

I hope you find this manuscript as enlightening as I did.

Cordially yours,
Nimozaran the Green
Septarch's Tower, Fallcrest

God Reaper

Forsaken dead, stay in your tombs,
Forsaken dead, stay in your crypts,
Nerull shall bind you, bind you in blood.

–Hymn of Nerull

In the earliest days of creation, when gods still walked the land alongside mortals and the Dawn War had just begun, Nerull—a clever and ruthless human wizard—became one of the first nonelves to learn arcane magic from Corellon. His newfound power soon drew him into the war against the primordials. After one particularly gruesome battle, Nerull looked over the fields filled with corpses and cursed at those who had allowed themselves to pass into death, avoiding the duty of preserving creation against annihilation. Retreating back to his study, he spent months brooding over issues of mortality and the threat of the elementals.

During this withdrawal, the mage first began his studies of the dead and their uses. He discovered that death need not be the end of a body's usefulness, and magical energy could bestow a semblance of life upon a lifeless corpse. He further determined that such magic could bind the soul to service, either in a body or without one. Rooted in Nerull's desire for the fallen to rejoin the war against the primordials, these discoveries became the foundation for the necromancy school of magic.

Overjoyed at his discovery, Nerull reached out to Aurom, god of the dead. The mage proudly presented his discoveries, which he believed could constitute a turning point in the Dawn War. Aurom rejected the findings, claiming that death was a part of the natural cycle that should not be breached. Little did Aurom know how much that rejection would cost him.

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Incensed that a god would throw away such a tool, Nerull approached other deities with his new discoveries. Each deferred to Aurom's judgement. With each rejection, Nerull's rage grew. He gathered his armies and, just after another battle against the primordials, Nerull attacked the god of the dead. Already wounded, Aurom fell to Nerull's surprise assault. Seizing Aurom's fleeing power, Nerull laid claim to the portfolios of death and the dead.

Rise and Fall

The other deities were shocked. Never before had a mortal killed a god, and many still did not understand the necromantic arts that Nerull had mastered. Before the pantheon could reach an agreement on what to do about this new god of death, Nerull offered up Aurom's other portfolios to be divided among the other deities, thus securing a place among them. Nerull saw the gods' acquiescence to his seizure of divinity as a sign of weakness, brought on by fear of the power he wielded.

While the gods battled the primordials for control of the world, Nerull's lust for power grew insatiable. The new god of the dead believed he could become king over all the gods. Eager to swell the ranks of the souls bound to his realm (known as Pluton), Nerull scourged the mortal creatures of the world with blights and plagues. It was during this time that he came be called the Reaper and the Hater of Life.

The other gods were ambivalent about Nerull's penchant for murder. The deaths he caused did not diminish the forces available to fight the Dawn War—in fact, his undead soldiers were tougher than they had been in life, and some were nearly immortal. Despite this, Pelor and Moradin named the new god "the Foe of all Good" and regularly met to debate what to do about him, and Corellon openly wept at what Nerull had done with the gift of magic.

Nerull grew ever bolder, confident in the limitless power he saw in his future and the cowardice of the other deities. Then another human wizard—a sorcerer-queen who had also learned wizardry from Corellon—perished in the Dawn War and passed into Pluton. Secretly, Corellon and Pelor, with the help of Moradin and Sehanine, fortified the queen's soul with even more of the qualities she had possessed in life: magical might, intellectual brilliance, shrewd discernment, unshakable courage, cold allure, and colder pride. Soon her soul shone brighter than any other, and Nerull's gaze became fixed firmly on her.

Enthralled, he named her Nera. As the conspiring gods had hoped, Nera (whose true name has long since been scoured from reality) proved to be Nerull's undoing.

Nerull showered Nera with gifts and gave her authority in Pluton to win her affection. Nera used her position to learn the god's secret of how to use souls for power, and began to amass her own store of magical might. Soon Nera turned on Nerull, releasing the bound souls of Pluton and turning their energy against their master.

Nerull fell, and the Raven Queen was born.

A Curse of Death

Some scholars believe that Nerull did not triumph over Aurom unscathed. The original god of death believed that all events are part of a cycle, from birth to death, and so should it be even for a god who presides over death. As Aurom died, he cursed the domain of death, so that any who took it would one day fall to death as well. It could be that this curse not only led to Nerull's fall, but is also the reason that potential usurpers now beset the Raven Queen on all sides. It might be only a matter of time until the Raven Queen suffers a fate similar to that of Nerull and Aurom.

For more information on Aurom, see "Power Play: Dead Gods" in *Dragon* 390. Nerull's demise at the hand of the Raven Queen is further detailed in the "Rise of the Raven Queen" sidebar in *Divine Power*.

Nerull's Clergy

While he held his position in the pantheon, Nerull was widely known and feared, but he had few priests and devotees. Most of those who openly prayed to Nerull were assassins and murderers. Nerull's priests, wearing rust-red garb and wielding sickles or scythes, performed their unholy rites in small shrines—usually located underground within crypts and catacombs.

Such rites often involved kidnapping residents of nearby villages and sacrificing them on rust-colored altars to the god of death. Communities rarely tolerated the presence of Nerull's clerics, and this discrimination was well deserved, since they often brought pestilence, poison, and other forms of death with them to usher the living into Nerull's gray realm.

The loose organization and sparse mandates of Nerull's clergy could lead to disagreements and open conflict between differing cults, and even members of the same cult. Some preferred to employ mass murder as a tool to provide their god with souls, believing that Nerull's name should invoke open terror. Others took a subtler path, wishing to keep Nerull mysterious. Still others, who believed in focusing people's attention on the inevitability of death, arranged for the untimely deaths of key members of a community.

The only known public temple outside of Pluton and Sigil lay deep in the Shadowfell, in a small village known only as Death of Innocence. When the Raven Queen came to power, she banished Death of Innocence into a domain of dread and sealed its borders. Large wooden gates and tall walls now surround the village, oozing blood like sap. Since

the Raven Queen sealed the settlement, no one has entered or left, but rumors whisper that an artifact the Raven Queen fears is hidden within Nerull's temple at the village center.

Most shrines to Nerull remain concealed in ancient dungeons, crypts, and catacombs. The inhabitants of such places are often unaware of the altars hidden in their domains. The only indication of the shrine is an increased potency of necromantic magic in the area.

In the millennia since Nerull's death, many small cults have continued to worship the Reaper in secret. Cells of cultists, perhaps insane or misguided, claim they can still hear Nerull's whispers in the Shadowfell. Such cells hope to restore Nerull to his former place and expect him to reward them for their service.

Legion of the Gray

During Nerull's rule on Pluton, countless souls arrived in the Reaper's dominion to be tortured and tormented for eternity. A small set of those souls, desperate to end their anguish, foreswore all other oaths and allegiances, vowing to serve only Nerull until the end of time. These souls formed the Legion of the Gray, the spiritual hosts of Pluton.

When the Raven Queen defeated Nerull, most of the souls that the Reaper had imprisoned were freed and continued on to the great beyond. The oaths of the Legion of the Gray bound those souls to Pluto even after Nerull had died. For centuries following Nerull's fall, the Legion marched out against the cosmos, seeking any being who could release them from their oaths and end their eternal bondage.

Gods, demons, devils, and every manner of creature attempted to seize the Legion and use it to bolster their own forces, but the members' vows to Nerull held firm. If a member of the Legion of the Gray fell, it was only a matter of time until the soul reappeared in Pluton.

Eventually, the Legion gave up its quest to gain freedom from Nerull. Now its members spend their deathless days patrolling the inner sanctums of Pluton, guarding the palaces and relics of the dead god. The Legion has collected much of the vast wealth that once filled the tombs and monasteries of Pluton, and its leaders occasionally use this treasure to fund mages, zealots, and other cultists they think might bring their god back.

Star Reapers

"The invasion of the Far Realm will destroy Angel and Elemental, Devil and Demon, mortal and monster."

–Eldas, vampire lord, leader of the Star Reapers

While the number of souls under Nerull's control was growing, his potential power seemed endless. Many feared that he would use this power to become the greatest of the gods, ruling over all others. The Star Reapers are still dedicated to this outcome.

Made up almost entirely of mages and psions, the group known as the Star Reapers is united by a fear of the Far Realm. The Star Reapers view the bickering among the gods and the primordials as a distraction—a petty disagreement long since resolved. These squabbles blind the powers to an even greater threat—the threat of invasion from the Far Reams that the Star Reapers believe to be inevitable.

Star Reapers see only one option: All the forces of the cosmos must unite under the banner of one powerful ruler. In their eyes, none had more potential to become such an all-powerful ruler than Nerull. He alone could amass enough power to unite the planes against the threat that the Far Realm represents.

The Star Reapers believe they can bestow no greater honor upon others than the gift of undeath. A zombie's soulless body can serve in Nerull's armies while its soul powers the god or acts in another capacity. Star Reapers also believe that passing into undeath will become the goal of every mortal after Nerull returns. They also know that the god will allow only the most devoted and most powerful to retain control of their souls in undeath.

An Unlikely Ally

While the end goals of the Star Reapers might be very different from those of the characters, Nerull's followers could become unlikely allies in a struggle against aberrations and the forces of the Far Realm. If the characters show interest in working against the Far Realm threat, Star Reapers could contact the party to offer or ask for help.

The Triumvirate

Nine hundred years ago, the fey courts exiled three eladrin. Vasres, now a lich, is a sadistic artificer who enjoys building puzzles to torment those he considers his inferiors. Ca'Sross, now a death knight, is a bloodthirsty warlord who drew the ire of the summer courts for running deadly hunts and waging needless battles. Nehmer, another lich, is a sorceress cursed by Oran (for reasons she has never disclosed) to be forever unable to show her face to another living creature.

The three exiles banded together out of common interest, becoming formidable adventurers. In their travels, they stumbled into a secret vault of Vecna, in which they claim to have discovered the remains of Nerull's original treatise on necromancy, bound in the skin of the dead god Aurom.

Vasres, Ca'Sross, and Nehmer first learned of the Reaper from this book's tainted pages. The echo of Nerull's divine spark took hold in their minds, promising each eternal life as an exarch, as well as vengeance against those who had exiled them.

Unaware of what promise had been made to the other two, each of the three swore an oath that not even death could stop them from restoring the fallen god to his rightful place.

The exiles have kept their vow so far, continuing their research as powerful undead. Recently, the triumvirate journeyed to Pluton with the treatise. Those who know of the triad suspect they might have found the means to resurrect the Reaper. It's also possible that the whole affair is just a ploy of Vecna's.

DEAD GODS

Nerull is not the only god who has died. Asmodeus rose to godhood by murdering He Who Was, a deity of peace and the creator of humans. Similarly, Orcus slew Amoth, the god of mercy. If the demilich triumvirate truly has found a way to resurrect a dead god, countless creatures will seek to acquire this information.

Followers of Nerull

Compared to most dead gods, Nerull still has a sizeable following, although his worshipers are hard to locate. Worship of the dead god typically involves leading a double life, since public adulation of Nerull is likely to result in execution or exile.

Hostility comes not only from the general public, but also from the followers of other gods. Devotees of the Raven Queen destroy any traces of Nerull worship they can find. Vecna's agents are more likely to capture the Reaper's followers alive, hoping to extract their knowledge. Similarly, followers of the good and unaligned gods (particularly Pelor and Corellon) do not want to risk allowing the dead god to regain a foothold in the world. Zehir alone tolerates the worshipers of Nerull, finding that those who revere the dead god have the right disposition for induction into Zehir's ranks of assassins.

Despite all the opposition, some creatures still choose to worship the Reaper. Such worshipers—typically necromancers or undead—are inducted into Nerull's cults through blood-soaked rituals under the light of the harvest moon. But not all followers of the dead god are crazed cultists living in abandoned crypts.

Creating a Follower

Enough vestiges of Nerull's power exist within the cosmos that a character can still gain some power through willing connection to the dead Reaper.

Classes

Characters who choose to worship Nerull can come from any class. Those with strong ties to the shadow

power source—particularly warlocks and assassins—are most likely to worship the Reaper.

Wizards who focus on necromancy might revere Nerull as the founder of their order and pay lip service to him. In addition, a number of mages delve into lore about the Reaper in hopes of finding ancient tomes and treasures that are rumored to lie undisturbed in the catacombs of Pluton. Some of these dark sages eventually come to venerate the dead god.

More than any other class, invokers are drawn to the worship of Nerull. When the Reaper died, his divinity was shattered and spread across the worlds. Some invokers have learned to harness these shards of divinity, becoming conduits that channel the echoes of Nerull's power.

Similarly, many would-be assassins who lack martial aptitude devote themselves to the Reaper as avengers. These zealots imbue themselves with Nerull's power to usher creatures into the afterlife. Clerics of Nerull are rare, and most masquerade as followers of some other god. Such clerics are most often warpriests with the death domain (see *Heroes of Shadow*™).

Alignment

Similar to worshipers of Vecna (*Dragon* 395) and Zehir (*Dragon* 415), most worshipers of Nerull are evil, so they do not function well as adventurers. Even those who are unaligned keep their piety secret, especially from those closest to them.

Adventuring

Before you create a follower of Nerull, it is important to understand what your character's long-term goals are. Does your character follow the Star Reapers and wish to resurrect Nerull in an attempt to save the world? Or does your character hope to lay to rest the soul of an ancestor who is a soldier in the Legion of the Gray? Does your character think the Raven Queen is too weak to hold onto the domain of death, and want this power returned to Nerull rather than risk it falling into the hands of Orcus or Vecna? While the end goals of any of these paths can be justifiable, are they worth the risk of bringing back a god who thought little of wiping out the living to fuel his own power?

Although most followers of Nerull seek his eventual return, some follow the dead god for reasons that are slightly more palatable for the unaligned character. Does your character worship him from a purely academic standpoint, to gain more insight into necromancy? Does he or she seek Nerull's power over the dead to help hold back the tide of the undead? Or maybe your character ultimately seeks to claim the Reaper's dispersed power and advance on the road to godhood.

Regardless of the reasoning you choose, speak with your DM and your fellow players to make sure that they are comfortable with your character worshiping a god that extols death and murder.

Feats

The following feats are available to characters who worship Nerull.

Reaper's Blade

Like the scythe Nerull carried long ago, your scythe cuts down any who stray into its path.

Prerequisite: Must worship Nerull

Benefit: You gain proficiency and a +2 feat bonus to damage rolls with the sickle and the scythe. This bonus increases to +3 at 11th level and +4 at 21st level. In addition, you treat the scythe as having the high crit property.

Nerull's Binding [Divinity]

You channel the power of Nerull to command the recently slain to protect you.

Prerequisite: Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Nerull

Benefit: You gain the power *Nerull's binding*.

Nerull's Binding **Feat Utility**

The shade of a dead enemy provides you with a dark veil of temporary protection.

Encounter ✦ Aura, Channel Divinity, Divine, Necrotic
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You drop an enemy below 1 hit point, or an enemy adjacent to you drops below 1 hit point.
Effect: You activate an aura 1 that lasts until the end of your next turn. You have partial concealment against enemies in the aura. Any creature that makes a melee attack against you or ends its turn in the aura takes necrotic damage equal to your Wisdom modifier. A creature can take this damage only once per turn.
Special: You can use only one channel divinity power per encounter.

Paragon Path: Soul Binder

"Death is not always the end. Not until the fight is over."

Prerequisite: Any arcane, divine, or shadow class; must worship Nerull

For those who devote themselves to Nerull, the nature of the Reaper becomes clear. These few can access a shard of Pluton—a domain of the restless dead unclaimed by the Raven Queen—and bend it to their will. For a true worshiper of Nerull, few higher rewards exist.

As a soul binder, you have bound a soul to your service. The soul might be that of an enemy whose torment you wish to prolong, a loved one whose company you wish to keep, or a friend whom you're saving from a vile afterlife. Regardless of your reasons, the soul must protect and serve you.

Level 11: Call Bound Soul

By exerting your will, you force the soul you have bound into the physical world to aid you in battle.

Benefit: You gain the *call bound soul* power.

Call Bound Soul — Soul Binder Attack 11

You call the soul bound to serve you into the physical realm.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Summoning
Minor Action **Ranged** 5
Effect: You summon your bound soul into an unoccupied space within range. The soul is an ally to you and your allies.

The soul lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend actions to command it mentally, choosing from the actions in the bound soul's description. You must have line of effect to the soul to command it. When you command the soul, you and the soul share knowledge but not senses.

When the soul makes an attack roll or a check, you make the roll using your statistics, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.

The soul lasts until it drops below 1 hit point. At that time, you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left). Otherwise, the soul lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until the end of the encounter.

Level 11: Soul-Bound Action

As you push your own limits, the soul bound to you senses your effort and exerts itself accordingly.

Benefit: When you spend an action point, your bound soul can also take a standard action.

Level 11: Touch of Pluton

You have mastered the divine magic of Pluton and can combine seemingly inimical energies.

Benefit: You can choose for your attacks that deal necrotic damage to also deal radiant damage.

Level 12: Overflowing Soul

You dismiss your bound soul to use its essence.

Benefit: You gain the *overflowing soul* power.

Bound Soul — **Summoned Creature**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)

HP Your healing surge value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can lose a healing surge for the soul if an effect allows it to spend one.
Defenses your defenses, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties
Speed 6
Insubstantial
The soul takes half damage from all damage sources, except those that deal force damage.
☼ **Mists of Pluton ✦ Aura** 1
The soul and its allies in the aura have partial concealment.
⊕ **Standard Action** (necrotic, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); your level +5 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d10 + your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier necrotic and radiant damage.
Level 21: 2d10 + your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma necrotic and radiant damage.
Minor Action ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Effect: The soul walks, shifts, runs, stands up, squeezes, or crawls.
Opportunity Action ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy hits you with a melee attack while you are adjacent to the soul.
Effect: The soul can push the triggering enemy 1 square.
Level 21: The soul pushes the triggering enemy up to 3 squares.

Overflowing Soul — Soul Binder Utility 11

Your bound soul leaves and grants your allies false life.

Encounter ✦ Divine
Minor Action **Area** burst 2 centered on your bound soul within 10
Effect: Your bound soul is dismissed, and you and each ally in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.

Level 16: Death Is the Source

You are an agent of the Reaper, and your reaping sustains you and the soul bound to you.

Benefit: Whenever your attack or that of your bound soul drops a nonminion enemy below 1 hit point, you gain temporary hit points equal to 5 + one-half your level. As a free action when you gain the temporary hit points, you can transfer some or all of these hit points to your bound soul.

Level 20: Gray Legionnaires

You open a conduit to Pluton, and members of the Legion of the Gray enter the world to do your bidding. The task is physically exhausting and places your senses between two worlds, leaving you vulnerable as you command the dead.

Benefit: Gain the *gray legionnaires* power.

Gray Legionnaires — Soul Binder Utility 20

You lose touch with the physical world as you summon more souls of Pluton to serve you.

Daily ✦ Divine, Summoning
Standard Action **Close** burst 5
Effect: You summon three bound souls into unoccupied spaces within range. These souls are allies to you and your allies. You grant combat advantage while more than one of your bound souls is present.

Each soul lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend actions to command it mentally. When you spend an action to command one of your bound souls, each of your bound souls can also take that same type of action, choosing from the actions in the bound soul's description.

You must have line of effect to the soul to command it. When you command the soul, you and the soul share knowledge but not senses.

When a soul makes an attack roll or a check, you make the roll using your statistics, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.

Each soul lasts until it drops below 1 hit point. At that time, you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left). Otherwise, the soul lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until the end of the encounter.

Nerull's Shade

Only a few places in the world remain consecrated to the Reaper—ancient temples hidden in the world's deeps, domains of dread banished from the Shadowfell, and Necromanteion in the heart of Pluton. These are the places one is most likely to encounter the wandering shade of Nerull—a vestige of his former glory seeking the death of all living things.

Even outside these unholy sites, worshipers of Nerull might be able to summon a dark semblance of their master. Doing so is risky, however, since Nerull's shade is just as likely to turn on his own worshipers as he is on any other living creature.

A greater concern is that an adherent of Nerull could use this shade as a catalyst to bring the dead god back to life. Even now, a small cabal of the Raven Queen's devoted seeks out Nerull's ancient weapon, Lifecutter, fearing what might happen if Nerull's followers should ever find the legendary scythe and unite it with the Reaper's wandering shade.

Nerull's Shade **Level 27 Elite Controller**
Large immortal humanoid (undead) XP 22,000

HP 400; **Bloodied** 200 **Initiative** +22
AC 40, **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 40 **Perception** +20
Speed 8, fly 8; phasing Darkvision, blindsight 5
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic, 15 radiant
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Doom Shade ✦ Aura** 3
Each enemy in the aura takes a –4 penalty to saving throws.

☼ **Seething Divinity** (necrotic, radiant) ✦ **Aura** 3
While Nerull's shade is stunned, dazed, or dominated, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 30 necrotic and radiant damage.

Death's Evasion
Whenever Nerull's shade is subjected to an effect that a save can end, the shade immediately makes a saving throw against the effect. On a successful save, the effect immediately ends.

Insubstantial
Nerull's shade takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage or psychic damage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Lifecutter's Shade** (necrotic, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +30 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + 22 necrotic and radiant damage (or 35 + 6d10 necrotic and radiant damage if Nerull's shade scores a critical hit), and the target cannot regain hit points (save ends).

Instill Bloodlust (charm, necrotic, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +30 vs. Will
Hit: Nerull's shade slides the target up to 5 squares, and the target uses an at-will attack power against a creature of the shade's choice. If the target misses, it takes ongoing 30 necrotic and psychic damage (save ends).

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Effect: The shade makes two basic attacks.

Move Actions

Living Conduit (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Requirement: Nerull's shade must be adjacent to a living creature.
Effect: Nerull's shade teleports to an unoccupied space adjacent to a different living creature in the shade's line of sight. The creature must make a death saving throw.

Triggered Actions

Bloody Reaping ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Nerull's shade is first bloodied
Effect (No Action): Nerull's shade shifts up to its speed. Each time Nerull's shade moves within 3 squares of an enemy for the first time during the move, the shade uses *Lifecutter's shade* against that enemy.

Reaping ✦ Encounter
Trigger: A creature is hit by *Lifecutter's shade*
Effect (Free Action): The hit becomes a critical hit.

Str 15 (+15) **Dex** 28 (+22) **Wis** 15 (+15)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 15 (+15) **Cha** 30 (+23)
Alignment evil **Languages** Supernal

Lifecutter

No one knows where Nerull's legendary scythe, called Lifecutter, originated. Some say it was the staff Nerull used to cut down Aurom; others say it was once the spine of an ancient primordial the Reaper killed. Regardless of its true origin, Nerull's weapon has reappeared throughout the ages in the hands of some of the most bloodthirsty killers and tyrants.

Lifecutter was born of death and murder, and it knows nothing else. While the weapon bears a grudge against the Raven Queen and the gods who opposed Nerull in life, Lifecutter is most content when used for widespread killing. The ancient scythe does not care who wields it or against whom it is used, as long as its bloodlust is continuously satiated.

The scythe communicates with its wielder by causing tattoos to appear on the latter's arms or hands, outlining its desires through gruesome ciphers. The tattoos fade as Lifecutter's wishes change, but they leave faint scars. After a wielder has used the weapon for many years, the scars overlap, leaving the skin mummified.

No one knows where Lifecutter is or how it appears in the hands of mortals. Some rumors point to a blindfolded skeleton in an ochre robe that waits near the gates of Sheol on Pluton, wordlessly offering passersby a draw from a deck of cards or a toss of blank dice. Other rumors point to Death of Innocence—the village hidden deep within the Shadowfell—and still others say that Ioun hid the weapon within the Astral Sea, fearing what would happen if Nerull's followers ever found it.

Lifecutter Epic Level

The red veins in this ebony staff pulsate as if to a heartbeat in counter-time with your own. At a whim, you can call forth a scythe-like blade of scarlet force from the tip of the staff.

Artifact: Scythe
Enhancement Bonus: +6 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +6d12

Property

- ✦ This artifact can also be used as a staff implement. The artifact's properties and powers apply to weapon attack powers and implement attack powers.
- ✦ You gain resist 15 necrotic and resist 15 radiant.
- ✦ Attacks made using this artifact ignore 15 of any resistance.
- ✦ All untyped damage dealt by attacks using this artifact changes to necrotic and radiant damage.
- ✦ If you fail to kill another creature by the end of any combat encounter in which you use this artifact, you lose a healing surge or, if you have no healing surges remaining, you take damage equal to your surge value.

Attack Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: You can use one of your at-will implement or weapon attack powers.

Attack Power ✦ Encounter (Free Action)

Trigger: A creature is hit with your attack using this artifact.
Effect: The hit becomes a critical hit for the triggering creature, and you gain a death saving throw failure that fades only after your next extended rest.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, weapon attacks you make with this artifact against AC can instead be made against Reflex.

About the Author

Jon Green is a French-speaking Texan living in Scotland (no, we're not sure how that happened either). This is his first article for *D&D Insider*™, but his previous credits include Ashes of Athas, Fourthcore Team Deathmatch, and some truly horrific and Pulitzer-worthy puns on Twitter (@Hzurr).

Codex of Betrayal: Levistus

By John "Ross" Rossomangno

Illustrations by Hector Ortiz and Anne Stokes

"I held course close behind the icebreaker. The other ship's gale-swollen sails initially obscured our view, but the hundreds of souls aboard sensed their destination. Too cold to make even a single utterance throughout the journey across Stygia, now the souls all began to wail. The pitiful keening rose above the howling wind. Their voices finally broke as the immense monolith of Levistus's tomb dwarfed even the icebreaker that cleared our way to those catacombs of frigid torment."

—Vozail Iceblood, Captain of the Frigid Hag

After being framed for the murder of Asmodeus's consort Bensozia, Levistus was stripped of his title as Ruler of the Fifth and imprisoned in an iceberg adrift in the frigid water of Stygia. But as he watched Geryon rule over his former realm, the entombed archdevil schemed and hatched a plan born of unimaginable patience.

Levistus Now

A century ago, for reasons known only to him, Asmodeus suddenly banished Geryon. Then, to the dismay of the other archdevils of the Nine Hells, he reinstated Levistus as ruler of Stygia. Despite restoring Levistus to power, however, Asmodeus left the archdevil trapped in his icy prison.

Levistus expressed no outward surprise at Asmodeus's action and seemed prepared to reclaim his title immediately and re-exert control over Stygia. If anything, his imprisonment had allowed him plenty of time to plot without distractions.

Now, despite his condition, Levistus's subtle schemes creep forward at a slow yet inexorable pace. He remains no less of a threat than his fiery counterparts. Like all devils, Levistus lusts for power, but his desire is compounded by a thirst for vengeance.

Rivals who believe Levistus's condition limits his abilities learn, usually to their terminal detriment, that he holds sway over countless agents. Favors and contracts drive a network of informants, assassins, diplomats, and soul collectors that would be impossible for most minds to track, but there is little else to occupy Levistus's thoughts. Even the minutest details do not escape his notice, within the bounds of Stygia or beyond.

As a master of details, Levistus devises complex contracts that skirt, but never openly defy, the laws that govern the Hells and the collection of souls. Through these intricate contracts, he forces devils bound to other archdevils into his own service. They usually become indebted to Levistus for a single favor and, in exchange, receive a particularly coveted soul or a returned favor of some kind. Although these "servants to two masters" are not numerous, Levistus uses his reputation of colluding with double-dealing servants to create suspicions that despoil his rivals' plans.

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Scheming at a Glacial Pace

Not long after his initial imprisonment, Levistus began stockpiling souls in the depth of his iceberg prison. He and the devils that remained loyal to him rationed their consumption nearly to the point of starvation. After he was restored to power, Levistus extended this rationing to all of Stygia. The devils of that icy layer bear the ignominious but apt title of the Hells' hungriest devils, and enemies assume Levistus is possessed of an irrational, supernatural greed.

In fact, Levistus has made a bank of souls of his prison. The countless frozen souls back the contracts and promises with his network of devils throughout the Nine Hells. Ships sail the icy seas of Stygia to deliver countless more souls every day and the "coffers" of the archdevil continue to swell.

Levistus sends his agents to tempt mortals who are known rivals of other devils. After he is in possession of their souls, he offers them to the rival devil in exchange for some treacherous act. The pride of most devils is too great to allow an enemy's soul to suffer at the hands of another devil when that opportunity could be their own.

The vast stockpile also represents an extraordinary temptation to many devils, particularly gluttonous ones, who could be awarded more souls than they might see in centuries in one fell swoop. Such a windfall is nearly impossible to resist; Levistus has secured the cooperation of many spies in exchange for lavish "feasts of souls" in one of the iceberg's ostentatious dining halls.

But bribery is only a small part of Levistus's plan for his vaults of souls. His true scheme is of such incredible scope that, even if other archdevils learned of it, they would doubt that it was true, or even whether it was possible. Levistus intends to lay siege to the Hells from within and starve his enemies into submission. If Levistus's bold scheme unfolds according to plan, the landscape of Hell's rule could be altered forever. Should he fail, the punishment Asmodeus will inflict upon him is certain to surpass mere imprisonment.

The Hungry Hosts of Hell

Much of Levistus's network of agents is established in the Outer Torments. When everything is ready, the Outer Torments will become a staging point to cut off the flow of souls to Avernus. This embargo will slowly starve the other archdevils' servants, a sensation only the denizens of Stygia are truly accustomed to experiencing for long periods of time. Levistus can then use the souls in his vaults to strike bargains with other devils and solidify a hold over additional layers of Hell. Any allies he secures can be turned against the layers that hold out against him.

Levistus knows that subjugating Avernus as quickly as possible is crucial once the flow of souls has been cut off, so he has made pacts with members of the Dark Eight. These powerful pit fiends serve Bel, but they always stand ready to usurp Bel's control for themselves if any opportunity appears. Levistus expects the Dark Eight, even those not beholden to him for favors, to view the interruption in the flow of souls as a failure in Bel's leadership. Combined with the bribery of many of the lesser archdevils currently out of favor elsewhere in the Hells, particularly Moloch and Azazel, this should create the chaos he needs to break down Avernus's role in supplying souls to the deeper layers of the Hells.

Then Levistus can slowly advance on the upper layers of the Hells that are caught between Avernus and Stygia. As far as the archdevil is concerned, the layers beneath him can suffer until his conquests of the upper reaches is complete. He does not expect Glasya, Baalzebul, Mephistopheles, or Asmodeus to cave to his demands quickly or easily. Levistus is also pleased by the notion that his rivals will know the experience of being trapped in their own domains.

Fringe Benefits

Even prior to his imprisonment, Levistus did his best to cultivate relationships with the denizens of the Outer Torments. He sought to woo those who were not devils (and thus were beyond the direct rule of Asmodeus), even if they live in Hell's archipelago by Asmodeus's whim alone. To most archdevils, who are concerned with plans within the bounds of Baator, Levistus's slow infiltration of the halls of power across the Outer Torments seems like a feeble bid for power over inconsequential territory.

The Outer Torments are rife with the banished and shunned creatures that Levistus often looks to corrupt or manipulate. Like Avernus, the Outer Torments are frequented by lesser archdevils. An eagerness to reclaim their former glory among the layers of Hell makes them ideal members of Levistus's network. Many of these agents are little more than informants tasked with monitoring rival archdevils' minions. Handpicked members of Levistus's network train and equip the pirates who will be instrumental in blockading the lanes that deliver souls to Hell. The identities and locations of these cells are known only to Levistus, who keeps them isolated from one another.

Levistus sows misinformation among devils he suspects might to betray him to Asmodeus. The archdevil frequently places false plans in their hands. When their reports prove untrue, Asmodeus exacts a punishing toll from them. His heavy-handed vengeance turns many of these duped spies against him and provides Levistus with motivated allies.

Agents of Levistus solicit visitors to the Outer Torments for souls and are found in virtually every marketplace and port trying to cut deals. In some venues, touts openly shout their proposals in the streets, and their offers usually are more lucrative than competing devils' offers. Levistus knows that

when his plan comes to fruition, the value of souls will rise dramatically, so he is willing to pay a premium now against expected windfalls in the future.

Establishments that don't welcome Levistus's representatives are infiltrated by more subtle agents. They engineer mishaps for unwary travelers and then present the means to escape misfortune—for the price of a soul.

For more information about the Outer Torments, refer to *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*™.

HISTORY OF LEVISTUS

Known as the murderer of Bensozia, former consort of Asmodeus and mother of Glasya, few are aware that Levistus was framed for that murder by the pit fiend Martinet. Levistus's dalliances with both Bensozia and her daughter could be considered the greatest indiscretions in the Nine Hells, and Asmodeus's ill will toward Levistus over that incident is well known. For more information about the tangled relationships between Levistus, Bensozia, and Glasya, refer to the article "Codex of Betrayal: Glasya" in *Dungeon* 197.

After Levistus was imprisoned, Asmodeus granted rule over Stygia to Geryon, and the Broken Beast remained loyal to Asmodeus during an uprising of the archdevils. Eventually, Asmodeus spat on this loyalty by restoring Levistus's status and banishing Geryon from the Nine Hells. For more about Geryon, refer to the article "Codex of Betrayal: Geryon" in *Dungeon* 176.

Stygia

Stygia is a realm of bitter cold and frigid seas. Creatures who set foot in the Fifth quickly realize that a pervasive sense of hunger lingers beneath the biting winds. The denizens of the place possess ravenous appetites and often have an air of desperation about them. The streets of Tantlin are filled with sluggish, emaciated devils that are often willing to go to great lengths for a single soul.

The sea of Stygia, its primary features, and its few permanent settlements are detailed in the *Manual of the Planes*™.

Lore

Levistus's icy imprisonment is a constant reminder of the dangers of earning Asmodeus's ire. Most archdevils are hesitant to deal with an entity so out of favor with the ruler of Hell. Through intermediaries, however, Levistus retains control of the fifth Hell and still tempts a great many mortals to relinquish their souls, appealing especially to the disenfranchised, the shunned, and the loners of the world.

Religion DC 32: Levistus is sometimes willing to meet with those who undertake a pilgrimage to his tomb bearing a suitable gift. His extensive network

of agents keeps him well informed about the dealings of other archdevils, knowledge he may be willing to trade.

Religion DC 42: The interior of the Tomb of Levistus is carved into tunnels and chambers that accommodate his guests and servants. The immense portion of the iceberg concealed beneath the surface of the Stygian sea is said to house vaults that contain vast wealth and the souls Levistus has collected.

The Tomb of Levistus

The enormous iceberg where Asmodeus imprisoned Levistus drifts with the tides of Stygia. The body of the archdevil is encased 100 feet inside an area of remarkably transparent ice near the iceberg's peak. The ice that surrounds Levistus magically resists all attempts to excavate him, but other areas of the iceberg have been hollowed into countless corridors, chambers, and vaults.

A collection of floating docks is anchored to the iceberg at the waterline. Ships moor there to unload passengers and their cargoes of souls. The last mournful cries of the damned are perpetually carried on the wind across the docks. Ice devils work tirelessly to herd the souls into the vaults deep in the bowels of the iceberg.

The docks do not make a ship's approach easy. Spars of ice jut from the iceberg below the choppy sea's surface, and the unnatural cold that imprisons Levistus causes shelves of ice to spread from the iceberg. These shelves must be continually cracked apart by work crews of devils and tall, iron-hulled icebreakers.

The Fleet of Levistus

In addition to the icebreakers that clear the water around the Tomb of Levistus, the archdevil maintains a great fleet of icebreakers that struggle to keep open the icy channels between Stygia and Malbolge. Levistus levies a heavy tax on the soul-laden ships of other archdevils that make use of these routes. Sailing those channels without an icebreaker is an invitation for disaster, and scavengers and opportunists abound, ready to pounce on any vessel capsized, crushed, or trapped by the shifting ice.

Levistus's devils and other agents also keep many ships that ply the remoter seas of Stygia. Most of these vessels are loaded with souls bound either for the Tomb of Levistus or eagerly awaited at the docks of Tantlin. These transports count numerous bone devils among their crew, so any attempt to attack one is a dangerous proposition.

Although Levistus appeals to pirates and encourages their efforts in other realms, he tolerates no piracy in Stygia. Swift hunter ships, crewed by the cruelest and most cunning of his servants, stalk the water for anyone who would dare steal cargo that is Levistus's due. These patrol vessels sometimes pose as ships in distress to lure in and ambush would-be raiders.

Above the Waterline

Tunnels from the docks lead past perpetually vigilant guard posts and entire garrisons of ice devils. The corridors wind in a labyrinthine fashion as they climb upward into the core of the Tomb of Levistus. The confusing passageways have led more than a few intruders, as well as unwary visitors, to their deaths. Wanderers who aren't cornered by patrols of devils fall victim to the overwhelming cold. Perfectly preserved, frozen bodies are a common sight in these twisting halls.

Some of the mazes lead to vast halls of beings encased in pillars of ice. These pitiful creatures are bound in the same fashion as Levistus, but the mortals among them are kept alive through diabolic magic. Heroes who oppose Levistus are rarely slain outright. They are instead entombed in these Halls of Frozen Memory. All too often, friends who seek to mount rescue missions are entombed beside the cohorts they intended to save. Servants who failed the archdevil are also placed here to dwell upon their failures and to serve as constant reminders to others about the price of disloyalty.

The tangled corridors become more systematic in the upper reaches, where they are carved into a frigid palace of awe-inspiring design. The furnishings and decorations, all made of crystalline blue ice, are wonders to behold. Levistus wants visitors to be reminded that he is an archdevil of wealth and taste, even if he cannot enjoy those trappings himself.

Entire suites are made available to worthy guests who call upon Levistus, even if they only ever deal with his intermediaries. Although their appearance is lavish, the accommodations are always bone-chillingly cold as a constant reminder of Levistus's presence. Succubi prowl these chambers and proffer temptations of the flesh and promises of warmth—and promptly report whatever secrets they uncover to their master.

Agents of Levistus use the strange and varied properties of the ice to spy on all visitors. Some of the ice is crystal clear for hundreds of feet and creates a perfect window to watch through. Other areas are fissured with hairline cracks that carry sound, albeit distorted, over great distance.

Those considered worthy by Levistus's highest-ranking devils are summoned to stand in the archdevil's presence. Gifts of great wealth, secret knowledge of the archdevil's rivals, an enormous number of souls, or a single truly valuable soul might be enough to catch Levistus's notice. He has also been known to keep guests waiting for years or more; this petty torment is a clear sign that Levistus values what the visitor has to offer but does not respect the person.

Below the Waterline

Beyond the dockside guard outposts, steep ramps plunge into the expansive chambers carved from the massive underside of the iceberg. These ramps are constantly monitored by the devils, but they are also infested with fearsome cold-loving creatures that are less tempted than devils to snatch a few souls for themselves from Levistus's personal stock. The temptation to steal sometimes proves too much for starving devils, even though they know that being caught means brutal punishment.

The souls themselves wander aimlessly through the frozen halls, many of them quite insane. Their torment is simple: eternal imprisonment with no hope of warmth or comfort. Souls that do not keep on the move quickly become encased in a rime of frost that thickens into layer upon layer of ice. Entire vaults become macabre sculpture gardens of those who believed the ice would end their suffering.

To their horror, these frozen souls remain sentient. Like the archdevil who claimed them, they can send thoughts telepathically, but only over a very short distance. A long conversation can lead to stillness and the danger of becoming trapped in ice alongside the captive soul. Some vaults echo with the inescapable, telepathic screams and insane gibberish of the damned.

Devils from all layers of Hell periodically devise schemes to infiltrate and rob the vaults. Levistus encourages the belief that success is possible because it lures enterprising devils into his clutches, but no entity has ever succeeded in escaping from his vault with a stolen soul.

Most recently, a pack of ice devils bred aquatic remorhazes and drove them to bore into the iceberg from below. Their tunnel progressed well, but the savage cold of Stygia quenched the remorhazes' fires. Soon the icy water of the Stygian sea filled the tunnel and refroze, sealing in the entire band forever.

AN AUDIENCE WITH LEVISTUS

Those who are called before Levistus are led up a spiraling staircase cut through a spire of ice rising from the berg. Visitors stand on a precarious landing where they are buffeted by the freezing winds of Stygia. They can see Levistus across a 60-foot gulf with a perilous drop. If the position alone is not enough to unnerve guests, it is compounded by the ancient white dragon and numerous flying devils that constantly swoop and spiral around the iceberg.

Levistus is utterly immobile in the ice, so he is forced to communicate by using telepathy. Unless the visitor is also telepathic, their responses must be spoken aloud. Levistus's telepathic power is such that he can send thoughts to anyone inside the iceberg, and he does so to his servants. Visitors and supplicants, however, must come and stand before him to show their deference and respect.

The curse that binds Levistus also prevents him from coming to harm, and he happily exploits that fact during negotiations. Levistus scoffs at threats; only Asmodeus can injure him in his current state. Any who insult him are beset by his airborne attendants. The lucky ones simply plummet to their deaths; the unlucky find themselves adorning a Hall of Frozen Memories.

When addressed with deference and plied with a worthwhile offering, Levistus is willing to hear anyone out. Whether or not he strikes a bargain or offers assistance is another matter entirely. Levistus is interested in only three things from visitors: their souls, their service, and their secrets. An offer of only one of these three is rarely enough.

The archdevil is constantly alert for anyone who might be of use in his plans to besiege Hell or to strike a blow against Asmodeus. He might deal with heroes who are aligned with unlikely planar forces, but he ceaselessly tries to corrupt such creatures or take their souls.

As a major player in the dealings of the Outer Torments, Levistus can provide valuable information about forgotten locations there or about ancient, discredited archdevils who call the place home. He might be willing to aid characters who wish to liberate a soul from another layer of Hell. If he believes heroes are powerful enough to disrupt the order of things, Levistus provides them with information about rivals' layers. Such information is not always entirely reliable, if a bit of misdirection suits Levistus's ends better than the truth or serves as a distraction for his own schemes.

Warlocks and those with infernal ties sometimes seek out Levistus in an effort to discover lost lore. It is a grave mistake to believe that his imprisonment renders him less dangerous or that his status among the other archdevils makes him more willing to deal with mortals. Levistus appeals to such visitors with false self-pity and tries to persuade them of their singular importance to him. He directs them to pursue increasingly dangerous schemes on his behalf with the promise of a reward just around the next turn. As he leads them on, his followers become increasingly corrupt and his hold on their souls tightens. When they have outlived their usefulness, they end up stockpiled in the soul vaults.

Many devils have met similar fates and are now trapped in the vaults, desperate to escape before they are discovered. Levistus employs teams of hunters, all nondevils, to stalk and capture these interlopers. Once caught, death is the best they can hope for.

Levistus in the World

Levistus's goals in the material world are similar to those of other archdevils. His followers concern themselves primarily with gathering more souls for the vaults. But his methods depart from those of his rivals. Many devils focus their effort on cities and other large settlements where the abundance of souls and frequent depravities offer good prospects for tempting mortals. They seek to establish large cults quickly to spread their diabolic corruption.

Levistus hunts souls on the fringes of society. His soul-harvesting minions seek outcasts and isolated individuals who will not be missed. As a result, his devils are rarely in competition with those of other archdevils, and other archdevils remain uncertain of the number of souls Levistus gathers.

Levistus takes the long view in his schemes and seeks out patient followers. He instructs his disciples to seek items and knowledge of value to devils in the service of other archdevils. Such material can bribe those devils into aiding Levistus's network or twist them into betraying their masters.

Followers

The criminal released from prison but shunned by his community, the banished political rival of the local duchess, the rogue who refuses to submit to the city's guild leaders—these are likely candidates for Levistus's devils to tempt into service. Victims are offered a means to achieve vengeance against, or power over, those who shunned, banished, and abandoned them. The devil appeals to the outcast's bitterness and encourages long, calculated plans for revenge. Mortals are directed down paths of deepening depravity, one small step at a time, until they are completely beholden to Levistus.

Devils of Levistus encourage targeted individuals to offer up the souls of others instead of their own—at first. These mortal harvesters are rewarded generously but with a single, dark caveat. The devil usually presents the mortal with an object symbolizing devotion, and the gathered souls are bound to it. To collect the ultimate reward, the object and the souls within it must be delivered to Stygia in person. The journey, which is perilous under the best of conditions, is compounded by Levistus's effort to break his disciple's spirit and force that disciple to finally pledge his or her own soul as well.

Levistus avoids open conflict with rivals in the material realm. He encourages subtlety and long-term planning, and rewards followers with abilities that draw upon the inescapable cold of Stygia to freeze or otherwise immobilize foes. A folk tale claims that those who pledge their souls to Levistus have an icy handshake and are never warmed by even the hottest hearth.

Many of the archdevil's servants act as bounty hunters. Captured fugitives are offered a choice between pledging their souls to Levistus or facing justice for their crimes. If the bounty can be collected for the quarry dead or alive, only the offer of a soul will spare their life or prevent a gruesome, painful death.

Worshipers of Levistus rarely speak and are uncomfortable in crowds. They prefer solitude and isolation whenever possible. Most choose to live just close enough to a settlement so they can replenish their supplies when needed and avoid crowds the rest of the time. Those who are more self-sufficient live even farther from civilization, where they nurse their hunger for vengeance for months or years at a time, dwelling on every minute detail to ensure their scheme is flawless.

The hardiest (or least sane) take up residence in lost ruins. Interlopers who fall into their clutches are offered the choice of pledging their soul to Levistus or being ritually sacrificed in his name. Sometimes, the creature that sought such a place turns out to be a like-minded loner, and the two begin to feed on one another's psychotic desire for vengeance. These chance meetings become the foundations of Levistus's rare cults in the wild.

Cults

Being loners and outcasts by nature, disciples of Levistus rarely form cults. Groups coalesce when a disenfranchised member of an organization seizes power, often through the aid of Levistus, and encourages other members to take part in his or her devotion. Such an event is likely to befall thieves' guilds or pirate crews, but it is not unheard of that a merchant house or even a city watch is swayed by one of the archdevil's disciples.

Levistus also appeals to those whose positions of authority make them unpopular or isolate them in some way. The commanders of strictly regimented border garrisons and the wardens of prisons are sometimes tempted by Levistus's promise of cold, calm order.

Two examples of Levistus cults are the Warmheart Orphanage and the crew of the pirate ship Frost Squall.

The Warmheart Orphanage

Killian Faretell has been the master of the Warmheart Orphanage for decades. Countless children orphaned by tragedy have been raised by the seemingly kind-hearted old man. It is no secret, however, that the bastard children of noble indiscretions have also been abandoned at the gates of the large manor. Headmaster Faretell always seems to learn the identities of those who leave such children behind, but

he closely guards this knowledge until the child reaches adulthood.

Killian sees that all his charges are properly educated. He also selects promising children for special lessons in the dark of night. He instructs them in manipulation and vengeance; he constantly reminds them of their abandonment and encourages them to exact revenge upon the world. Those who exhibit particular talent early in life are further tutored by Mistress Dewwit, an accomplished wizard and secret diabolist, or by Master Jovitian, an alchemist with a love of poison.

Just prior to each child's adulthood ceremony, Killian introduces the teachings of Levistus. He reveals the identities of the parents who abandoned them or those responsible for the parents' deaths, and encourages the young adults to claim the souls of those that wronged them. Most of these young disciples devote their lives to furthering Killian's agenda and to collecting souls for Levistus.

The Frost Squall

There came a day when notorious Captain Val Rannick, a pirate of the northern seas, saw that her ship was going to be overtaken by a savage storm that she and her crew would not survive. The pirates sheltered below deck as Rannick stood by the wheel, captain to the end. As the frigid wind scoured the deck, an ice devil appeared before her with a glowing sapphire. In exchange for a soul, the creature promised that the gem would lead her on a safe course through the storm.

Captain Rannick called her first mate to the helm and butchered him in a bloody sacrifice. The devil kept its word, and told the captain the gem needed to replace her eye. Desperate to survive, she carved out the orb herself with the same blade that slew her first mate.

The remainder of the crew, thrilled at their narrow escape from destruction, became zealous followers of their captain despite the awful circumstances of their survival. The newly renamed *Frost Squall* became more successful in its raids, and the captain's treatment of those taken from raided ships became increasingly cruel. The crew, seeing their shares of booty steadily growing, encouraged and then participated in rituals to Levistus that stole their prisoners' souls. Now, when Captain Rannick takes on new crew to replace losses, they are quickly faced with a choice: join in the depravity or become another sacrifice.

Beneath the ship's signature pennant of a blue skull impaled by crossed icicles, the wood of the *Frost Squall* groans with the invisible burden of its cargo of souls. The hull and deck are perpetually rimed with frost and a chill fog often surrounds the ship when it is under sail. Captain Rannick's sapphire eye guides her course toward a gateway that will allow the ship to sail from the material world to Stygia so she can deliver her stolen souls and receive her reward from Levistus.

Levistus in Your Campaign

At low levels, the characters could encounter a solitary worshiper of Levistus at the heart of a plot of vengeance. His or her intricately devised plan has accounted for everything but the involvement of the party. They must not only determine the identity of the disciple of Levistus but also uncover those who have been corrupted by participating in the diabolical scheme.

At mid-range levels, the party might discover a prominent nonplayer character is actually a collector of souls for Levistus and is preparing to deliver those souls to Stygia. Only the characters' intervention can prevent the departure, but devils in the service of Levistus are watching over the NPC to protect the transfer. Meanwhile another pack of devils in the service of a rival archdevil are intent on stealing Levistus's prize.

Finally, at high levels, Levistus's plan to lay siege to the Nine Hells is put into effect. The characters could be manipulated into assaulting key points in Avernus as a distraction to cover Levistus's true intent or even be paid through intermediaries to attack ships delivering souls to Baator. Alternatively, they might be invited to Stygia to test the impregnable nature of the vaults. If they discover a weakness, Levistus has no intention of permitting them to escape with his secrets.

About the Author

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Ecology of the Neogi

By Jeff Morgenroth

Illustrations by Christopher Burdett and McLean Kendree

You say the drow are bad? Aye, cruel as demons they are—but I've seen things down there that are worse; things that yearn to see us all as slaves at their feet, or as food in their bellies. Creeping, slimy, and ruthless they are, their avarice making even dragons look content. The neogi are down there, friend, just waiting to make you their own.

—Niko the Gray, escaped thrall

Slave Takers

Even in the far reaches of the Underdark, which lacks no shortage of fabled terrors and nightmare entities, few creatures have the boundless greed and patient hatred of the neogi. These aberrant slave lords see everything in terms of possession, with themselves as the inevitable owners of all the world's treasures. This greed goes beyond material wealth, for the neogi crave the submission of other races and take megalomaniacal pleasure in seeing them enslaved.

In loathsome caravans they wander the world and the planes. They deal in wares illicit and foul, trading to any creature sordid enough to bargain with them. Although such customers are often immoral, they are seldom as evil as the neogi, which might even connive to enslave or devour the very clients they profit from.

When the neogi's wares become scarce, they renew their stock with raids led by their psychically enslaved thralls. Survivors of such an attack are corrupted by the alien will of their new masters, which take them into dark places from which the only escape is death or madness.

Possession: Neogi Psychology

Be patient, my eager slave. In time you will die, but now is the hour for service. There is still much work to be done and many things to take. Once it is all mine, I will honor you by devouring your flesh, but until that time, you must grovel and toil.

—Xocolylex, neogi slaver

Communication and Language

The monstrous appearance of the neogi belies their race's devious skill for wordplay, developed over unknown millennia of trading with entities from across the planes. Although a neogi's mind is a morass of Far Realm corruption, to outsiders they portray a veneer of fairness and reason. When negotiating a trade, the neogi are amiable, patient, and always several steps ahead of their clients. They make it a point to know everything about those they deal with, the better to exploit, cheat, betray, or enslave the unwary.

Neogi can communicate telepathically, but they prefer to speak aloud in the bizarre, phantasmagoric speech of the Far Realm. Among customers, they speak the client's native tongue in calm, sibilant voices. Doing so eases the tension a listener invariably feels when confronted by the unsettling, alien spectacle of the neogi's form.

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After communication is established, a neogi says anything in a treacherous attempt to possess everything. Lies, truth, offers of peace, and threats of violence drip from the neogi's writhing, wormlike tongue with irresistible charm.

Only against their slaves and those they intend to enslave do they use the full scope of their telepathic power. A slave seldom hears its master's voice. Rather, the neogi's possession is so subtle that the victim interprets the monster's commands as its own thoughts. The *neogi push* power reflects this control.

A neogi's insidious manipulation should always be felt on the battlefield. You can give any neogi the ability to dominate targets with *neogi push*. Use the power to turn the neogi's enemies against one another or to control the behavior of clients during the neogi's illicit business dealings. It must be used very carefully outside combat, because of its potentially short duration.

ALTERNATIVE MECHANICS

This article presents a handful of alternative monstrous powers to illustrate the neogi's story elements. You can add these to any neogi stat block or swap them with other powers. You could even "kitbash" a monster with these new abilities, building a vastly different kind of neogi or an original aberrant creature. Each new element's entry includes suggestions for its use. See the neogi slave master at the end of this article for an example of a customized neogi.

Standard Actions

Neogi Push (charm, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when no creature is dominated due to this power
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). The target does not remember being dominated.

Emotion

The world's star-touched scholars might try to delve into the motivations, thoughts, or feelings of neogi. Such theories are unneeded when faced by the two emotions neogi have shown the world with frightening regularity: obsession and hate.

Neogi are driven by a ceaseless desire to possess everything they set their pitiless eyes on. This mania consumes them and fills their lives with schemes, trickery, and violence. Neogi go to any length short of death to acquire treasure or slaves. After the object of its obsession is owned, a neogi turns its attention to the next acquisition.

If something stands in a neogi's way, an eerie hatred roils within creature's poisonous mind. Neogi do not stop until the focus of such hatred has been slain, devoured, or enslaved.

Despite the intensity of their emotions, neogi are seldom driven to be hasty or impulsive. Their hatred may be murderous, but above all, a negoi is patient.

The following qualities demonstrate how a neogi's obsessive rapacity can repel attempts to influence them subconsciously.

Immune charm
Resist 10 psychic

Intelligence

Neogi weave schemes and plots with impressive foresight that accounts for all manner of possibilities or events. These schemes become even grander when an entire neogi brood works together, directing many intellects toward a common goal. Even when working together, each individual neogi plans treachery for its own benefit. This is no secret to its peers. Jealous competition sharpens the mind of each neogi, allowing it to better serve the brood.

If a neogi is ever unable to pay a debt to the brood, it is taken as a slave itself. An enslaved neogi accepts its fate, but it never forgives. Eventually it uncovers a weakness in its owner and finds a way to make itself master once again.

Slaves trying to think their way out of psychic domination encounter a neogi's cunning most acutely. The neogi's telepathic understanding of its slave allows the neogi to manipulate the slave in the most psychologically effective way. This might be through pain, through waves of fulfilling sensations, or by warping the slave's perceptions. The slavemaster's gift power shows how a neogi's appalling intelligence can reveal itself on the battlefield.

Triggered Actions

Slavemaster's Gift (charm) ✦ **Recharge** when a triggering target succeeds on the rerolled saving throw
Trigger: A creature is within 10 squares of the neogi and ends any of the neogi's charm effects that a save can end.
Effect (Free Action): The triggering creature must reroll the saving throw. If it fails, the effect resumes, as well as one of the following effects (roll 1d6), which ends when the original charm effect does:
⚀ ⚁ *Delusions:* The creature considers no other creature to be its ally.
⚂ ⚃ *Euphoria:* The creature takes a –4 penalty to saving throws.
⚄ ⚅ *Torment:* The creature is weakened.

Organization

Neogi are social creatures. They band together in broods of from five to twenty members. Ironically, the neogi's avarice plays a large part in ensuring the brood's survival; by pooling their slaves, the neogi can launch more successful raids and intimidate competitors who would be too strong otherwise. When the violence ebbs and the treasure is taken, cooperation

ends. The neogi always squabble over the spoils, from the mightiest slave to the most frivolous bauble, and their squabbles frequently erupt into violence.

While neogi act as individuals when bargaining with clients, the brood votes on decisions that affect the entire group. A neogi's place in the brood's hierarchy, and therefore its voting power, is determined by how much it owns.

The number of neogi in a brood is small, but they are surrounded by so many slaves of so many races that their caravans resemble a menagerie.

No slaves are more prized than umber hulks, whom the neogi raise from birth to serve as laborers and protectors. Umber hulks also dig the tunnels that the neogi sometimes use to travel safely and secretly, hidden from sight to the rest of the world.

Neogi possess an unwholesome means of asexual reproduction, befitting their loathsome, otherworldly origin. Each member of the brood shares a common heritage to a great old master: a neogi that has been transformed into a living incubator by the poisonous injections of its brood-mates. For the short time it lives after this nightmarish transformation, a great old master is the most powerful of all neogi. But before long, the spawn within devour the host from the inside and spill out in a squirming mass of gore, segmented legs, and hungry mouths. This process is of particular reverence to the neogi, who view it as a sacred act of power and revenge.

THE TSO

Neogi are not confined to the depths of the Underdark. Their greed also sees them charting the limitless expanse of the Astral Sea and the Elemental Chaos. These plane-dwelling neogi, referred to as "tso" by natives of those planes, operate as pirates and smugglers in their spider-shaped ships that are living constructs. In bold maneuvers, the tso fly alongside prey vessels, such as those of the githyanki or djinn, and rend the hulls of these ships with their craft's grasping claws and spines.

Wretched Horrors: Neogi Physiology

Look, slaves, on the form of ultimate perfection.
—Nssethrovor, neogi great old master

Bristles

A neogi's repulsive abdomen is covered by thorny bristles that resemble the spines of a porcupine and the hairs of a tarantula. Bristles are 4 to 5 inches long and sharp enough to penetrate exposed skin. Using tiny bands of muscle that run beneath its flesh, the neogi can cause these bristles to flatten, rise, or ripple in patterns that both mesmerize and nauseate onlookers.

Many neogi preen their bristles, keeping them functional by plucking out bits of gore with their prehensile tongues. Some dye their bristles outlandish colors to demonstrate their intellectual refinement or their ranking within the brood.

Frail Bodies

A neogi's physical proportions scarcely measure up to their reputation as vicious slavers. Their features are hideous, but their stature is laughable compared to other terrors in the Underdark. A neogi's arachnoid limbs, however, can carry it over nearly any surface. These segmented limbs are fleshy and flexible, unlike the rigid limbs of true spiders. A neogi's body stands just 4 feet high, but the rubbery curves of its neck bring its head high enough to make level eye contact with most humans.

The impression of thinness and frailty is deceptive. Most neogi are at least as physically strong as the humanoids they enslave, though they rarely strain their muscles. They prefer to have slaves do the physical work.

Great Old Masters

No neogi evokes such shock and revulsion as a great old master. As a neogi ages, it becomes progressively crueler and greedier, and draws ever closer to the precipice of insanity. A neogi that becomes insane is a threat to the entire brood, because when it loses control of its mind, it will also lose control over its slaves. A neogi that is suspected of nearing this threshold is 'selected' by the brood to become the unwilling host for the next generation of neogi. There is no honor in this selection; to the contrary, it is a death sentence for the chosen creature. Other neogi surround it and frenziedly sting it hundreds of times. The overdose of venom makes the neogi swell to nearly four times its size. Its abdomen loses its bristles and transforms into a distended egg sack that seethes with restless, developing spawn. If the neogi was not insane before, the pain of this transformation is bound to push it over the edge. Gestation takes only a few weeks, during which the great old master's body is slowly consumed from the inside out. Its legs atrophy from disuse or slough off as the spawn inside it devour the joints and connecting tissues. Spawn seep from open sores covering the creature's body. Eventually, a neogi spawn swarm bursts from body and devours the gory remains.

The living incubator power can reinforce the great old master's presence as a disgusting, spawning corruptor and strengthens its role as a controller.

Triggered Actions

Living Incubator ✦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature in the neogi's *thrall field* fails a saving throw.

Effect (Free Action): Until the end of the encounter, the triggering target cannot spend a healing surge while in any neogi's *thrall field*.

Physical Differentiation

As befits a creature from the ever-changing maelstrom of the Far Realm, neogi come in many shapes and forms. Most of this physical differentiation results from their stomach-churning life cycle, which involves dramatic changes in size and shape during the progression from hatchling to adult and finally to the bloated great old master. Within age groups and even within broods, however, there can be striking differences between individuals.

Neogi spawn might emphasize certain features of their adult counterparts more than others, making the newly hatched brood appear like a crawling miscellany of body parts. Some spawn are mostly gangly legs, like the benign harvestmen insects of the surface world. Other spawn are ravenous worms, writhing and devouring everything they come in contact with.

Young neogi that are lucky enough not to be cannibalized by their brood mates can display a variety of traits when they reach maturity. For example, some neogi have legs that are serrated like saws while others are wispy and no thicker than a halfling's arm. One neogi's head might bulge with row upon row of needlelike teeth or be a tapered wedge that bobs eerily when the creature speaks. Most neogi have claws that are a primitive mockery of human hands, but rare neogi possess delicate hands that are almost identical to a human child's.

A Menagerie of Slaves

I have workers, soldiers, beasts, sycophants, and supper—yet my collection is incomplete, for I do not have you.

—Ibixiss, neogi slaver

Although each neogi is a formidable creature, it is a neogi's collection of slaves that makes them truly dangerous. To a neogi, slaves are everything. These

thralls provide status within the neogi brood, spending power at market, tools for grueling tasks, weapons to dispatch foes, and food.

A neogi's slaves come mostly from among creatures that dwell in the endless labyrinths of the Underdark. Duergar, goblins, grimlocks, hook horrors, kuo-toas, troglodytes, and trolls are common, but rarer prizes find their way into a neogi's possession. Devils, elementals, and drow are among the most prized, because ownership of such crafty slaves demonstrates the neogi's superior cunning or bargaining power. In the rare instance when a neogi captures a hated mind flayer, the illithid can expect a humiliating exhibition of subservience ending in dismemberment and devouring.

Without doubt, the most valuable slave in any neogi's collection is its umber hulk. The umber hulks' versatility as workers and soldiers is a strategic resource to the brood. The neogi breed umber hulks and train them to servitude from infancy.

Despite the eclectic nature of most neogi's slaves, humans remain a staple, thanks to their hardiness, prevalence, and corruptibility. Neogi capture humans and other surface-dwellers in raids. A brood sometimes gains easy access to choice stock by bribing the gatekeepers of a population center or by using their slaves to construct secret paths beneath a targeted community so that they can strike unexpectedly. With practiced coordination, the neogi's monstrous slaves and soldiers quickly round up their master's newest acquisitions with minimal bloodshed. Dead slaves are good only to feed the carrion crawlers.

No time is wasted before polluting a newly captured slave's mind. Valuable slaves are given a mental ambrosia that floods their senses with satisfaction or torment. Former thrall Niko the Gray, that ashen-faced mercenary who broods ominously at the Drunken Swan Inn, described the neogi's hold over him.

"It was like trying to stay awake in the moments before sleep takes you. A fellow might fight it, but once those eyelids fall and the body eases, it's too sweet a lure to ignore. That's what these monsters do to you—they gaze at you with those dead, black eyes, and somehow you want nothing more than to serve them, even though the sight of them makes you want to retch.

"They change you.

"Your panic turns to calm, your revulsion is smothered beneath compelled admiration, and you find yourself doing everything you can to make them happy.

"I remember feeling strong only when I was around my . . . master, as if being away made me sick with a longing I've never felt for anything or anyone else. I felt strong in its presence. It commanded me to move stones so big they would take five men to lift, but I moved them. I would have killed myself trying, purely to please the master.

"At the same time, I loathed it and loathed myself for groveling to it. I craved the opportunity to do its bidding just as I craved the chance to wrap my chains round its hideous throat. Most of all, I hated how my feeble attempts at resistance amused it. It wanted me to fight against its control, and fail, and despair because I failed.

"Part of me still does."

Favored Thralls

No creature enslaved by the neogi goes unchanged. Some, like Niko the Gray, are psychically twisted so they experience a wave of elation when they obey. Others have their senses ignited so they feel their master's every displeasure as agonizing pain. The neogi master assesses the psyche of each slave and tailors the method to the slave for maximum effectiveness. Slaves blessed with abilities the neogi can profit from, such as knowledge of engineering or alchemy, tend to be treated less harshly but they are no less controlled. No slave is ever trusted, no matter how many times it has demonstrated its loyalty.

The *Far Realm fury*, *slaver's scent*, and *no release* powers let you customize a neogi's thralls. These powers might assist the illicit schemes of the neogi or demonstrate their dominance as slave masters of the Underdark.

When a neogi master feels the deep bite of unfriendly blades, its slaves sometimes feel a compelling impulse to defend it. Part battle-lust, part otherworldly psychosis, *Far Realm fury* turns a brute or soldier into a dire threat in defense of its master.

Triggered Actions
Far Realm Fury ✦ Encounter
Trigger: An enemy bloodies an allied neogi within the thrall's line of sight.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The thrall shifts up to its speed toward the triggering enemy. If the thrall ends this movement adjacent to an enemy, the thrall can then make a melee basic attack against the enemy. In addition, until the end of the encounter, the thrall gains a +2 power bonus to melee damage rolls.

No release turns slaves into relentless opponents that ignore grievous wounds out of an unflappable love for or fear of their master.

Triggered Actions
No Release ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The thrall drops below 1 hit point.
Effect (Free Action): The thrall makes a saving throw. If the thrall saves, it drops to 1 hit point instead.

Because a neogi's primary motivation is always to acquire more slaves, it bestows the treacherous power slave taker's scent on thralls so that they can psychically draw out future victims. *Slaver's scent* is especially useful for lurkers, who can use it to weaken opponents before a neogi ambush.

Standard Actions
Slaver's Scent ✦ Encounter
Attack: Close burst 5 (one enemy within the burst); level + 3 vs. Will
Effect: The target takes a –2 penalty to Will and saving throws, and grants combat advantage (save ends all).

The Patient One

Neogi share a common legend concerning their origin and what they see as their inevitable destiny. Niko the Gray recounts it here.

"What I'm about to tell you, I wish I could forget. I'm not making this up or exaggerating. I was there—or rather, it seems my captor was, and it sent images of strange places and distant eons into my mind's eye. I saw the unbroken line of its forebears, back to the beginning with a skulking, wormlike thing that writhed in a place the sages have told me is called the Far Realm.

"Mind flayers took this worm-thing and tortured it. My captors must have felt that this was important, because through them, I felt that worm-thing's pain as if it were mine. Eventually, a leader of the mind flayers devoured the dying captive. Big mistake. The thing burst from the illithid's guts and transformed into the shape of my captor. I felt the monster's joy at paying back its torturers.

"It turns out that this new monster wasn't my master at all. It was the first neogi, and it was not pleased. It killed so many illithids and stole so many of their secrets that the mind flayers cooperated with each other to drive the neogi into our world. This neogi ensured the survival of its race by willing itself to spawn the first brood from its own flesh.

"The neogi call this progenitor the Patient One, and they say that the Patient One will return. For now, it waits within the neogi until the time is right. Then, old wormy will emerge and gather all the broods in a murderous crusade to enslave every living thing in the world and beyond. The neogi want more than anything to venture back to the Far Realm and make slaves of the mind flayers who drove out their ancestor.

"I don't want to be along on that ride.

About the Author

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Neogi Statistics

The following statistics update the neogi previously published for the D&D game.

Neogi Great Old Master — **Level 16 Controller**
Large aberrant magical beast — XP 1,400

HP 157; **Bloodied** 78 — **Initiative** +10
AC 30, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29 — **Perception** +12
Speed 4, climb 4 (spider climb) — Darkvision
Immune dazed

Traits

Thrall Field ✦ Aura 1
Enemies in the aura take a -4 penalty to saving throws.

Standard Actions

Scythe Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 13 damage, and the target falls prone.

Enslaving Bolt (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi as a target (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is dominated instead of slowed and penalized (save ends).
Each Failed Saving Throw after the First: If bloodied, the target is dominated until it takes an extended rest.

Psychic Shackle (psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +19 vs. Will
Hit: 2d10 + 15 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Larva Burst ✦ Encounter
Trigger: When the neogi is first bloodied.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +19 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 13 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
Effect: The ground in the area is covered with squirming grubs, which are difficult terrain.

Skills Bluff +20, Insight +17

Str 20 (+13)	**Dex** 14 (+10)	**Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 21 (+13)	**Int** 22 (+14)	**Cha** 24 (+15)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10

Neogi Slaver — **Level 10 Controller (Leader)**
Medium aberrant magical beast — XP 500

HP 106; **Bloodied** 53 — **Initiative** +7
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23 — **Perception** +8
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb) — Darkvision
Immune dazed

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage and the target is slowed (save ends both).

Charm Bolt (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi as a target (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target also cannot see the neogi (save ends both).

Psychic Shackle (psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi's next turn.

Minor Actions

Thrall Goad ✦ Encounter
Effect: Close burst 5 (allies in the burst); the target makes a saving throw with a +5 power bonus against one effect that a save can end.

Skills Bluff +15, Insight +13

Str 11 (+5)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	**Int** 19 (+9)	**Cha** 21 (+10)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10

Neogi Spawn Swarm	Level 10 Brute
Medium aberrant magical beast (swarm)	XP 500 **HP** 131; **Bloodied** 65
AC 22, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22	**Initiative** +9
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	**Perception** +8 Darkvision
Immune dazed; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks	

Traits

Swarm Attack (poison) ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 poison damage.

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage and the target is slowed (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Psychic Scream (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: When the swarm is first bloodied.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Str 18 (+9)	**Dex** 19 (+9)	**Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 21 (+10)	**Int** 5 (+2)	**Cha** 21 (+10)

Alignment evil **Languages** telepathy 10

Neogi Taskmaster	Level 11 Artillery
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 600
HP 90; **Bloodied** 45	**Initiative** +7
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24	**Perception** +8
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb)	Darkvision
Immune dazed	

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Pain Bolt (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +16 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).

Command of Return (psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +16 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target must move at least 2 squares closer to the neogi before the end of its next turn, or the target takes an additional 10 psychic damage.

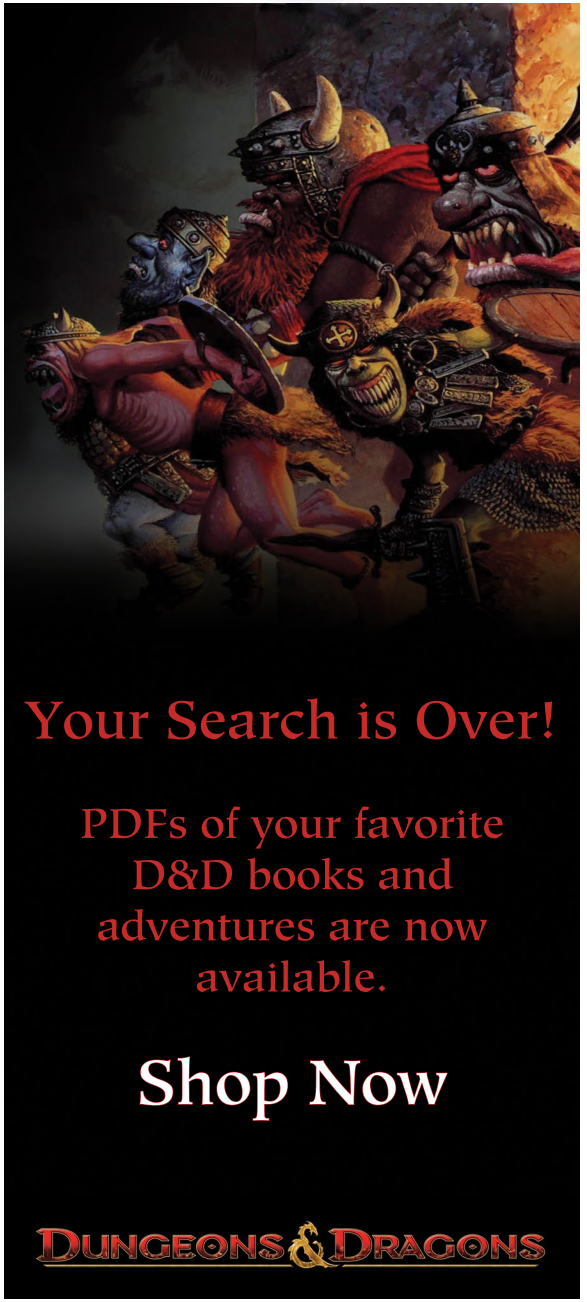
Minor Actions

Pain Goad ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Close burst 5 (allies that are not neogi in the burst); the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses but gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of the neogi's next turn.

Skills Bluff +15, Insight +13

Str 11 (+5)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	**Int** 19 (+9)	**Cha** 21 (+10)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10



Unearthed Arcana:
Personality Traits

By Matt Sernett and Claudio Pozas

Illustrations by Kieran Yanner and Steve Ellis

Characters exist as more than just a collection of abilities, powers, and feats. In the Dungeons & Dragons® game, you have the chance to portray a proud halfling barbarian, a brave human knight, or a scholarly eladrin wizard. The game gives you many tools to shape and realize your heroes in the descriptions of their powers, race, and alignment. Traits are another facet that can help to define your character.

Traits serve as starting points for roleplaying your character consistently. Choosing and writing down traits that reflect the convictions, beliefs, and quirks of your character encourages you to adhere to the same traits from game session to game session.

Traits are divided into two broad categories: merits and flaws. Merits are positive attitudes and beliefs your character espouses. They exemplify the behavior of good and lawful characters and the good traits of unaligned characters. Flaws, on the other hand, are negative attitudes and quirks your character possesses. They can be chosen to humanize a character, giving him or her a more fully realized personality that is not a one-dimensional caricature of a single virtue.

Like alignment, traits are reminders rather than restrictions. Your character is free to behave against his or her convictions, as all people do from time to time. Circumstances might force a character to act contrary to his better nature or to find the strength to overcome an innate flaw at a crucial moment.

Obviously, none of this is new to roleplayers. Acting out your character's strengths and weaknesses is one of the cornerstones of any roleplaying game. What this article offers is a method for systemizing traits so that it becomes easier for players to portray their characters' traits consistently across many game sessions.

Choosing Traits

Your character can have zero, one, or two traits. You might choose only merits or only flaws, or you might choose one of each. Just like class and role, traits should be chosen with the other characters and the DM in mind. Don't choose traits that are likely to generate conflict between player characters without discussing that choice with the DM and the other players first. This is everyone's campaign, not just yours.

The logical time to choose traits is when characters are first created. That's not the only possibility, however. See "Changing Traits" later in the article for advice about changing a character's traits during play.

The list of traits provided here is neither exhaustive nor mandatory. Your DM can delete traits from the list if they don't suit the tenor of the campaign, and players are free to suggest new ones that they'd like to use.

Whether a trait is a merit or a flaw, it serves as a potential weakness. Telling the truth, for example, can get you into just as much trouble as lying, depending on the circumstances. So too with bravery: Sometimes discretion really is the better part of valor.

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Taking damage, spending actions, losing treasure, or getting into trouble in general are common, significant consequences of adhering to one's traits. But so are persevering to the end of an arduous mission, risking your life to save someone else, exploring dangerous places that sensible folk avoid, and defending the weak against those who would exploit them.

Action Points

Acting in accordance to one's beliefs can bring great confidence. This confidence helps a character exceed limits. To reflect this fact, when your character adheres to his or her traits in a significant manner, the DM can award you an action point. Each trait can gain you only 1 action point per session.

Adhering to a trait in a significant manner usually means sticking by your convictions even—or especially—when you face a significant drawback or danger by doing so. You shouldn't gain an action point for adhering to your Amenable trait in a situation where being amenable is easy or expected. Remaining properly deferential to a villainous noble who has imprisoned you and who treats you poorly might grant you an action point.

Changing Traits

People change during their lives, especially when they're exposed to great danger, near-death experiences, and world-changing events, the way adventurers regularly are. Just as you can retrain powers, feats, and skills, you can also do so with traits. This doesn't interfere with normal retraining at all. You should, however, provide a plausible reason for your character's change. A character who had the merit Amenable, for example, might decide to switch that to a new flaw, Mistrustful, after having a harrowing run-in with the thieves' guild and being conned out of several valuable magic items. Likewise, if the character had only one trait, or no traits, at that time, he or she could pick up a new trait as a result. Conversely, the player might decide that the experience wasn't enough to flip the Amenable character all the way to Mistrustful, but it was enough to make the character not Amenable anymore, so that trait is wiped away.

Whenever you change traits, however, bear in mind that while people do change, they seldom change radically or permanently. After being conned out of a valued magic item, you might swear never to trust strangers again, but if trust is part of your nature, you probably will. If changing ourselves was easy, bookstores wouldn't be filled with self-help titles.

What if you find that you simply don't like your character's chosen traits? Maybe you misjudged the personality you wanted to portray, or your traits don't mix with the other characters as well as expected. If that happens, talk to your DM about dropping the problem trait and possibly choosing another that's more in line with the way your character behaves. The point of the game is to have fun, not to punish players for a single choice made during character creation.

List of Traits

Below are ten traits, divided into five merits and five opposing flaws. You can't choose the merit and flaw that oppose each other (it's hard to be both charitable and greedy at the same time). Your DM might lift this restriction if you can make a good case for how your character developed those opposing traits and can explain how you'll put them into action.

Each trait has a list of specific actions that serve as examples. A character that possesses a trait isn't required to conform to all examples grouped under that trait. The examples are only guidelines to help roleplayers implement the trait consistently.

Merits

The following traits are all merits and are presented in alphabetical order.

Amenable (Merit)

You are cooperative and conciliatory. Amenable is opposed by Vain.

Compliant: You prefer to leave things to the experts. If you follow orders, you'll be fine.

Courteous: There is always time enough for good manners. Graciousness proves goodness.

Diplomatic: Reasonable people can sort out their differences without resorting to violence. Social order requires give and take.

Jocular: Grin and bear it. Always leave them laughing. Without laughter, what's the point?

Brave (Merit)

You set aside your own safety and feelings to do what needs to be done. Brave is opposed by Cowardly.

Daring: Whatever it is, it's worth the risk. You belong wherever the danger is highest.

Honest: It takes great courage to tell the truth, but honesty is the best policy. Sometimes what people need to hear the most is what they fear hearing.

Passionate: You wear your heart on your sleeve. You'd rather love and lose than never love at all. It's always better to let feelings out than to keep them bottled inside.

Self-Sacrificing: You always have more to give. You'd rather see others happy and well than avoid the sadness or pain that could come to you by getting involved or taking a risk.

Charitable (Merit)

You are always ready to give to others, whether they need gold, a helping hand, or a second chance. Charitable is opposed by Greedy.

Empathetic: You easily see events and situations from others' points of view. You find it hard to blame

others when you understand what brought them to make bad decisions.

Forgiving: You let slights roll off you like water from a duck's back. Everyone deserves a second chance, and people you care about deserve every chance.

Helpful: You can't pass a person in need without lending a hand, a donation, or at least some advice. No one should face trouble alone.

Merciful: A defeated foe deserves a chance to surrender. Once your enemies are clearly on their last legs, you find the mercy in yourself to offer them a chance to escape with their lives and change their evil ways.

Diligent (Merit)

You do things thoroughly. Diligent is opposed by Reckless.

Cautious: Discretion might not be the best part of valor, but it's undeniably a part. Looking before you leap has saved you from a lot of pain and trouble.

Painstaking: Everything must be correct down to the last detail. You prepare for all possibilities.

Industrious: Whatever needs doing, it's best to get it done right way. And there's always more to do.

Relentless: You won't rest until a job is finished. Every lead must be followed, from first to last.

Honorable (Merit)

You believe in a stricter standard of behavior than most. Honorable is opposed by Dishonest.

Law-Abiding: The law exists to preserve the society you share and to protect people. Willingly breaking laws promotes the breakdown of society and shows that the lawbreaker cares nothing for anyone else.

Oath-Bound: Your word is not lightly given. After you make a promise, you stick by it with all your might.

Respectful: When fighting worthy enemies, you try to make your presence known before attacking, either with a formal salute with your sword or some other challenge. Even those of low birth or low morals deserve to be treated fairly.

Truthful: You avoid lying at all cost. Even bending the truth is hard for you.

Flaws

The following traits are all flaws and are presented in alphabetical order.

Cowardly (Flaw)

Your first priority is your own safety. Cowardly is opposed by Brave.

Fearful: Never go in first. Never volunteer to take risk. You perform best from the back rank. Someone else can take point.

Phobic: You harbor a deep, irrational fear of something. Work with your DM to determine the object of your fear.

Superstitious: You habitually perform dozens of little rituals to avoid bad luck, avert the wrath of the gods, and ensure smooth and easy sailing. They don't always work, but that doesn't prove they aren't worthwhile.

Unambitious: You avoid conflict when you can. If challenges must be met, you focus on the small ones while hoping someone else handles the tough stuff.

Dishonest (Flaw)

You place a low value on ethics and ethical behavior. Dishonest is opposed by Honorable.

Cheating: Why do things the hard way when there's an easier path? Rules are for suckers and people who lack imagination.

Corrupt: Integrity and honor are just words that people without ambition hide behind. If someone is willing to help you so that you'll help them, it's win-win; bribery is just a judgmental label.

Misleading: People are too trusting. If you take advantage of them, maybe they'll learn an important lesson about life. It's not your fault that some people are too stupid, greedy, or ignorant to question your motives.

Underhanded: There's a trick to everything, and it's better to be the person playing the trick than the one being fooled by it. Why face a problem head-on when you can head it off with cleverness?

Greedy (Flaw)

If you don't have it, you need it. If you have it, you need more of it. Greedy is opposed by Charitable.

Avaricious: Money makes the world go round, and it makes your heart race. You want gems, gold, and jewels above all else. Cash in your purse makes you feel confident and secure.

Secretive: Don't give out your secrets without getting something in return—especially more secrets.

Obsessed: Your concerns are more important than other people's. After your mind is fixed on something, you won't stop until you've accomplished the task—and the task usually is acquiring something.

Gluttonous: The more food and drink you get, the better you feel. Enjoying such things is what life is about.

Reckless (Flaw)

You don't plan; you make it up as you go. Reckless is opposed by Diligent.

Impulsive: If you think it, you say it or do it. It's better to act quickly and risk making a mistake than to make the right move too late.

Inattentive: You're a big-picture thinker; the details will fall into place on their own. Besides, the little stuff is boring.

Overconfident: You're ready for anything. Fate and righteousness are on your side. Whatever the challenge is, you'll be up to it when the moment arrives if you just hang loose and don't overthink things.

Thrill-Seeker: It might not be smart, but it sure looks like fun. You have to amuse yourself somehow, and life is boring without a little danger.

Vain (Flaw)

You have no doubt that you are more important than other people. Vain is opposed by Amenable.

Boastful: You're the best at what you do. It's a fact. If people want to get the most from your presence, they need to know how amazing you are.

Condescending: You're sure other people have their good moments, but really, how can that compare to what you do? If you're not the best at it, it's probably the type of thing that isn't worth doing.

Impatient: You don't have time to waste waiting for others to get organized. When something needs doing, it should simply be done. What's the point of waiting and excessive planning?

Narcissistic: Just because you're naturally the best-looking and smartest person in a room doesn't mean you shouldn't put some effort into appearances. Naturally, everyone will admire anything you have to bring to the conversation, whether it's looks, witty observations, or intelligent insights. You are always right, after all, and any failures are due to others.

Creating Traits

Many other traits are possible beyond those described here. Use the examples above as guideposts for what should be a trait. In general, a trait should have multiple expressions to allow it to come into play in many different situations. One-dimensional traits come up only in narrow circumstances, and they paint your character with one color instead of giving a broad palette with which to describe a personality.

That said, virtually any element of personality or identity could become a trait if you can imagine it coming up in play and impacting your character's behavior for better or for worse. Mistrustful was mentioned earlier as a possible trait; a mistrustful character would be suspicious of potential employers who approach the group out of the blue and would question the sincerity of people who offer help without demanding something big in return. A stubborn character could always insist that the group follow only his or her plans or refuse to deviate from a plan when it begins showing signs of failure. A few other possibilities are Vengeful, acutely Introverted or Extroverted, Nonconformist, and Perfectionist. Sadly, negative traits are easier to come up with than positive traits—but then, many negative traits start out as positive traits and become negative when they are carried to extremes.

DMing Traits

After a DM decides to make traits available for a campaign, they become another element of adventure design, like encounters and rewards. A game that features traits should reward players for acting in accordance to their traits, especially when those traits drive characters to make decisions that aren't the easiest, safest, or surest routes to success. To that end, the DM should plan some decision points into adventures where the players can either adhere to their traits or struggle against them.

Ideally, every game session should involve at least one roleplaying encounter or event where the characters face a chance to act on their traits. To provide these opportunities, the DM must know the traits of the characters. (The Improviser's Cheat Sheet described in *Dragon* 426 is an excellent tool for this.)

When setting up a roleplaying encounter, it helps to make a few notes on the dilemma and the likely choices characters can make, based on their traits. If one situation can challenge the traits of more than one character, so much the better.

EXAMPLE

Corey is setting up a roleplaying encounter for his group. The characters have been hired by a sage to retrieve the Idol of Kahlinar. Instead of just moving the adventure along, Corey adds a scene where a rival scholar offers to pay the characters a larger sum to bring him the idol's jeweled eye before they deliver it to their employer. They can claim the jewel was missing when they recovered the idol. In his adventure notes, Corey writes down the predicament and the responses that could be expected from characters with specific traits.

Do they take the job from competing sponsors?

- **Greedy:** They accept.
- **Honorable:** They decline.

Although this isn't a hard-and-fast rule, the choice facing the characters usually should not boil down to whether they should move forward with the adventure. If one of the choices is to shelve the current adventure, then the dilemma was constructed poorly. A well-designed dilemma should affect how future events unfold—it could determine whether characters face a combat or a puzzle farther down the road, or whether they're greeted with trust or suspicion by an important nonplayer character—but an entertaining roleplaying encounter is its own reward.

Here's an example of a roleplaying encounter determining a later part of an adventure.

EXAMPLE

Corey's players turned down the larcenous proposal from the rival scholar, and that decision earned the Honorable ones among them an action point for passing up on a significant benefit (the hefty payment the scholar offered). But the scholar then hires some thugs to attack the characters as they travel to their patron's home with the Idol of Kahlinar, in an attempt to steal the idol. If the players know what's behind this attack, they'll understand that hewing to their traits brings consequences.

Here's an example of a quick roleplaying encounter that has no further consequences.

EXAMPLE

Corey sets up a tavern scene so his players can discuss their next quest in character. Instead of just sitting back and letting the players talk, he injects a few situations that create possibilities for players to highlight their characters' personalities. Other outcomes are possible.

An overworked server is being bullied by drunks. What do the characters do?

- **Honorable:** They intervene.
- **Cowardly:** They ignore it.

A pickpocket is working the room, and she offers the characters a small cut if they keep quiet. Do they take it?

- **Greedy:** They take it.
- **Honorable:** They turn her in.

Abusive town guards try to pick a fight with some newcomers (not the player characters). How do they react?

- **Reckless:** They join the fight.
- **Amenable:** They negotiate a solution.
- **Cowardly:** They leave the bar.
- **Dishonorable:** They leave the bar now but attack the guards by surprise later.

Sometimes a roleplaying encounter meant to have no further consequence for the adventure gives the DM ideas and hooks for future encounters and even entire adventures. In the previous example, a character who defends the server or turns in the thief to the tavern keeper might receive an important clue that helps the characters resolve their current adventure or that leads them to a future quest.

Finally, a DM should always be on the lookout for those times when players take matters into their own hands and roleplay their traits without any prompting from the DM—when an Honorable character salutes the villain or a Vain character delivers a brief monologue instead of attacking during a surprise round. Losing an action is a significant consequence worthy of reward. An action point lets the player catch up on actions later in the fight as a payoff for acting in character. Such spontaneous displays of roleplaying make the game more enjoyable for everyone.

About the Authors

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

The Sundering:
To Rule Two Worlds

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Hector Ortiz

As Abeir and Toril move apart, a few fell entities seek to rule parts of both worlds and maintain (or create anew) linkages between the two worlds so they can move back and forth between them. A handful of heroes have discovered these ambitious evils and seek to thwart them, but they need help—and fast.

Secrets of the Art

A few terms are known only to bards (among whom they are embroidered to mean all manner of fanciful things), a handful of clergy of Mystra, sages of the Art, and ambitious, boldly experimenting wizards.

One of these terms is *lurking regard*, the belief that many spells have their own sentience (gained from mysterious bodiless creatures drifting in the world). This is why spells betimes appear to aid and abet certain spellcasters (and other creatures) while betraying or frustrating others.[1]

A second secret of the Art is *paronder*, the notion that Mystra or some other entity or mysterious natural force of the multiverse promotes a sort of cosmic balance, so that those who wreak havoc will later have havoc visited upon them, those who act kindly will be treated with kindness, and so on.[2]

A third is *worldfire*, the concept of draining the energies of one world or plane of existence through a magical conduit, ravaging it locally in the process, to empower a spellcaster in another beyond the powers they would normally be able to wield.[3]

All these terms are based in reality—things that have happened and can be made to happen again—but they are often exaggerated far beyond what can be achieved by most experimenters in most conditions. The Sundering is *not* "most conditions," however.[4]

Worldfire

It so happens, Elminster has let slip, that some dabblers in worldfire are seeking to take advantage of the moving apart of Abeir and Toril to drain life from one world to make themselves mighty in the other. Mystra has specifically forbidden her Chosen and other servitors to work directly against these dabblers; the risk of their conduit

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magic successfully draining silver fire from her Chosen and causing real and lasting damage to her, the Weave, and both Abeir and Toril is too great.

She urges those loyal to her, however, to make mortal adventurers, dragons, and all magically powerful beings aware of the dangers of such dabblings, in hopes they will thwart worldfire-seekers.

Accordingly, Elminster wants Faerûn to be aware of three current users of worldfire, wizards who can, through magic of their own devising, call upon energy they are "robbing Abeir of" to cast more spells than they should be able to—spells that deal greater damage and have larger areas of effect than the same spells cast by others. These three are Roroebryn, Talaskos Murthrond, and Velvroame.[5]

Roroebryn "The Stag" is so called because he often disguises himself with an illusion spell that changes his facial features and gives him insubstantial but seemingly real antlers. He seeks wealth and petty political power, always gravitating to bustling cities where he can subvert matriarchs and patriarchs of wealthy families or high-ranking civic officials, thereby bettering himself. He loves gaining new spells.[6]

Talaskos Murthrond is a handsome, purring-voiced former Zulkir of Thay who long ago foresaw Szass Tam's rise, faked his own demise, and departed his homeland for a skulking existence spent hiding in remote places of Faerûn amid magical mists.[7]

"Velvroame" is the alias of a renegade witch of Rashemen who rejected the traditions and society of her heritage in favor of a life spent mastering shapeshifting magics and seeking to rule various sorts of shapeshifters, proclaiming herself "The Everchanging Queen," a quasi-deity all such creatures should obey.[8]

Elminster warns that several cabals of wizards, such as the Seekers of Forgotten Dooms in Selgaunt and the Wondermasters of Athkatla, are experimenting with combining spells to drain life from afar and portals to link planes of existence. He further advises they may soon join the ranks of worldfire wielders.

An Outcast Devil

There have always been outcast devils, unique creatures of the Nine Hells who would be archdevils if room and tolerance for them existed within the hierarchy presided over by Asmodeus.[9] Most of these frustrated, socially powerless creatures return to life as themselves if slain or spend viciously predatory lives lurking in the most remote rifts, peaks, and broken rocks of the wild wastes of Avernus, uppermost of the Hells.

At least one of these fell creatures, Klaskornus by name, has recently discovered or acquired a means of gating himself at will between Avernus, Abeir, and Toril—along with anything magical he's carrying.[10]

Klaskornus appears as a handsome, oversized satyr who has two brow horns and crimson flesh. He also has a barbed, stinging tail, a retractable thirty-foot-long forked tongue that swiftly regenerates if severed and comes with needle points to inject swift but short-lived paralyzing venom, and can use the *spider climb* power at will. He can cast arcane magic "as a mighty sorcerer,"[11] and he has at least two other monstrous forms (one reptilian and another that can fly).

According to Elminster, Klaskornus has taken to frequently jaunting back and forth between Abeir and Toril during the Sundering, stealing or seizing whatever he can to gain wealth and power—mainly items of magical power but also royal regalia such as crowns and scepters that can be used to advance claims to thrones or at least ownership of castles and estates.

Although this relentless accumulation of personal power is obviously self-serving, Klaskornus claims to be protecting the Hells by being a dedicated agent of paronder, balancing the flows of magic and material within the multiverse to prevent more drastic imbalances—and inevitable "corrections."

The devil's true purposes are unknown to the Sage of Shadowdale, but as Elminster dryly observed, "It takes no great intellect to conclude that they cannot be good—and if pursued with any success, will quite likely visit harm on both Abeir and Toril."

Orvraunt the Doomed

As the Sundering unfolds, a few Faerûnians will have the misfortune to encounter a particularly accursed wanderer who has visited the Realms a time or sixty before, but over so many years he's become more the stuff of legend than seen in most mortal lifetimes.

Just what bad behavior caused a god—it is forgotten precisely which god it was and the issue is disputed by sages concerned with holy matters—to curse the man named Estel Orvraunt is unknown to mortal Faerûnians alive today. Yet it is certain that this unfortunate mortal was long ago cursed to wander the planes, magically goaded to be constantly restless and on the move. In bitter frustration and loneliness, he often maliciously lashes out at those he meets.

Far more rarely, Orvraunt aids and even champions individuals in need whom he encounters—but he cannot be relied upon and is divinely driven to travel on, tarrying nowhere.

Orvraunt seems to be able to open his own portals in places he can "feel" are right for doing so, and through them he can "walk between the worlds," striding from one plane to another. Other creatures have become aware of this and often skulk near the Doomed Walker, awaiting their chances to travel into another plane with him. Some of those who stalk Orvraunt are intangible, unseen, or partially visible flying forms, the lurking regard sentiences that can influence spells. And from time to time, living spells are seen with him, too.

White-haired, slender, agile, and sardonic, Orvraunt is usually stylishly garbed. A mimic given to mockery, he is generally well armed, his most powerful weapons magical or hidden. He is a cunning foe, wise in the ways of the world, and a shrewd judge of character.[12] Some say he's desperate for companionship and the friendship or love of humans (and

Elminster says such opinions seem to match what he has observed in his fleeting contacts with the man).

Notes

1. According to Elminster, this belief is based in truth but is overblown; aside from what have been called living spells and the various servitors of Mystra (and other deities of magic), sentiences that can readily attach themselves to spells or magic items to control them are far rarer than folklore and tavern tales would have everyone in the Realms believe.

2. Elminster says this term is named for Paronder, a long-ago human sage of magic who first promoted the belief that the Art has its own tenets or perhaps its own sentience and studying it to derive what might be called the philosophy of magic would be something useful to all who sought to wield and understand magic.

3. Worldfire, Elminster stresses, is merely a catchy invented word. Unlike spellfire, there is no fire involved and few wild discharges of energy. The very nature of this quite real, dangerous-to-all practice forces it to be a firmly controlled, covert draw of energy from afar, *not* any sort of raging conflagration or ray or beam of ravening destruction—though, in some cases, such energy can intensify spells that unleash fiery destruction.

4. So Elminster darkly warns. He adds that lurking regard, paronder, and worldfire aren't mere fancies and should concern or induce prudence in all practitioners of the Art. He doubts, however, "headstrong, reckless, and arrogant know-too-littles such as Szass Tam and the Princes of Shade will *ever* learn more prudence."

5. Roroebryn is pronounced "roar-OH-brinn." Talaskos Murthrond is "Tell-ASK-ohzz MUR-thrawn-dd," and Velvroame is "Vell-vuh-ROAM."

6. His full name is Leoanos ("Lee-OWN-oh-ss") Roroebryn. Elminster says he was the clever, amoral, handsome younger son of a non-noble family of fisherfolk in Marsember until he became the servant of a minor wizard, Ulmtrath Erevyn, who had relocated from Sembia to Marsember, and—accompanied by Roroebryn—later moved to Scardale. There Roroebryn discovered he had a real talent for the Art. He promptly murdered Erevyn, took his dead master's Art, and became a scourge of independent wizards in the Moonsea North, slaying them and seizing their spellbooks and items to make himself formidable.

7. Although his habit of conjuring magical mists (sometimes including various gaseous or amorphous creatures that will fight at his command) has led some individuals to mistakenly believe Murthrond was related to the mysterious "Mistmaster" of the northwestern High Forest (in the Sword Coast North), Elminster doesn't believe the two have ever met, let alone collaborated on anything or learned from each other. Murthrond has become a recluse who prefers to watch, withdraw, and wait patiently for the best moment to strike—very different from most authoritarian zulkirs.

8. Velvroame's real name is Ilara Lywycharan ("ILL-arra Lih-WITCH-ah-ran"), but those who use it are warned she aggressively hunts down and eliminates all who know it, desiring to keep her heritage and nature as mysterious as possible. Her nickname is derived from an old Rashemi word, "Alaumvelvaerinaroame," which means "She who walks alone and answers only to gods."

Among her native Rashemi, she was a burly, battered-faced giant (and onetime hathran). Lywycharan has ankle-length tresses of black hair that animate under her mental command to wield weapons, employ tools and components, grasp railings and door handles, and carry and manipulate many small, light items. She is paranoid and rarely without multiple escape routes and planned tactics to deal with any foe she encounters.

9. In the Realms, Gargauth and Nergal are among the best known of these outcasts.

10. In his case, "anything magical" means any tangible item bearing an enchantment, including very temporary ones. So, Klaskornus can imbue a potato or a knife by touch and will, giving the item the stench of saltpeter and a clinging aura of inky, swirling smoke and shadow, and then transport it with him. Like all archdevils (or greater unique devils), Klaskornus can so taint one item per round—thus, given time enough, he could carry a sack of many potatoes with him on one of his planar journeys. This effect cannot affect living creatures.

11. Looking back over various D&D® game editions, Elminster said: "His true measure is unknown to me, but beyond what ye gamers have betimes in the past called 22nd level."

12. According to Elminster, Orvraunt the Doomed regenerates no matter what is done to him and cannot be slain by mortals. Even servitors of the gods shun him rather than fight him; it seems the deities they serve respect the doom placed on Orvraunt—or the one who laid it upon him.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which space remains to pile up more papers.

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By Erik Scott de Bie

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By Eytan Bernstein

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By Tim Eagon

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By Aaron Infante-Levy

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